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POCKET ADVENTURES

Tina Neylon

IRELAND

VISIT…

POCKET ADVENTURES

Ireland

Tina Neylon

HUNTER

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Recommended Reading

Travellers' Trails by Hugh Oram, (Appletree Press, 2001): This attractive little book covers 24 different themed tours, including battle sites, film locations, James Joyce, The Easter Rising, and has lovely photographs. You can dip in and out, gaining information on the area you are in, if you don't want to follow a tour.

Footloose in the West of Ireland by Mike Harding, (Michael Joseph, 1996): Walks in the western counties of the Republic, with sketch maps and suggested routes (you'll need detailed maps to actually walk). What makes this book so worthwhile is that it's much more – it covers the music, history and folklore of the areas, and is written with love and humour by a man who grew up in England in a family of Irish descent.

The Dingle Peninsula by Steve MacDonagh, (Brandon, 2000): Illustrated with marvellous color photograublishing companyphs, this is the best book about this beautiful area of Co. Kerry. It includes detailed maps of the Dingle Way long-distance walking route. The author has lived in the area for more than 25 years, running a pub. Among his authors is Gerry Adams of the IRA.

Literary Tour of Ireland by Elizabeth Healy (Wolfhound Press, 2001): Even if you aren't interested in writers, you will find this book valuable, as it is packed with information about all of the island's 32 counties. It is lavishly illustrated with color and black and white photographs and sketch maps.

The Visitor's Guide to Northern Ireland by Rosemary Evans, (Blackstaff Press, 1998): Regularly updated, this is a useful guide, very readable and it has lots of photographs and some maps.

For Historical Background

Atlas of Irish History, General editor Dr Seán Duffy, (Gill & Macmillan, 2000): An enjoyable way of learning about Irish history, using maps as well as many other illustrations.

Oliver Cromwell: An Illustrated History by Helen Litton (Wolfhound Press, 2000): One of a series on historical figures, an excellent overview of the period and the impact of the man on the country. It has lots of illustrations in both color and black and white.

The Easter Rising: A Guide to Dublin in 1916 by Conor Kostick and Lorcan Collins, (O'Brien Press, 2000): This little book takes you through the streets during the six days that changed Ireland forever, with lots of historic photographs to help bring that time to life.

A Walk through Rebel Dublin 1916 by Mick O'Farrell (Mercier Press, 1999): This covers the same events in a different way, by focusing on locations such as St Stephen's Green, Dublin Castle, and so on, and is again illustrated with maps and contemporary photographs.

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Waymarked Ways . . . . . Inside back cover

Introduction

Ireland has a lot to offer – unforgettable scenery, friendly people, and opportunities to enjoy a huge range of sports, entertainment of all kinds, and historic sites to explore. About 100 million people around the world claim some Irish ancestry, so many visitors come here to discover their roots.

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Although Ireland is small, there is much to make a stay here truly unforgettable. Ireland has a surprisingly varied landscape. Outside our cities are areas where there is little traffic, and the only sounds are birdsong or waves crashing against the shore.

One of Ireland's greatest assets is its people, who are generally friendly and talkative. Many are creative, and our writers, dramatists, composers, musicians, artists, filmmakers, craftspeople and fashion designers have an international reputation that is staggering, considering the size of the country.

The island is made up of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, the latter being part of the UK (the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland). Northern Ireland is also called Ulster, the Six Counties, or just the North. To avoid confusion, I use "the Republic" and "the North" to distinguish between the two parts of the island. Where material refers to the entire island, it is called Ireland. Those of us who live in the Republic call our country Ireland, and not Éire *– its name in Irish and used on our postage stamps.*

The People & Their Culture

◆ Population

The population of the Republic is 3.9 million (Census 2002) and of Northern Ireland 1.6 million (Census 2001). In the Republic, majority live in urban centers, and the western seaboard is sparsely populated. About 40% of the entire population of the Republic lives within 60 miles (97 km) of Dublin; and only 9% live in its northwest region, made up of counties Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Monaghan and Sligo.

Northern Ireland is the second most sparsely populated part of the UK, after Scotland, with 317 people per square mile (122 per square km), and with a predominantly young population – 25% under 16 and 37% under 25.

◆ Religion

The Republic's constitution guarantees freedom of conscience and the free profession and practice of religion to all citizens. According to a recent census, the population's religions were: Roman Catholic, 91%; Church of Ireland (Anglican), 2.5%; Presbyterian, 0.4%; Methodist, 0.1%; Jewish, less than 0.1%; and about 3% belonging to other religious groupings or with no specific beliefs. While the majority still marries in church and have their children christened, few attend church regularly, especially in urban centers.

THE NORTH'S TWO COMMUNITIES

Protestants outnumber Catholics, although that is gradually changing. In the 2001 census 40.3% stated their religion as Catholic, an increase of 3% in 10 years. Catholics are in the majority in some parts of Ulster – Derry City, County Fermanagh,County Armagh and parts of Belfast. In the most recent census 20.7% were recorded as Presbyterian, 15. 3% as Church of Ireland and 3.5% as Methodist, and a further 6.1% belonged to other Protestant, Christian or Christian-related denominations.

◆ Social Change

There have been huge changes in attitude towards sexuality over the last 20 years or so, although conservative groups continue to be a force. Note that divorce became legal in the Republic only in the 90s. Despite some criticism, there's an acceptance of couples living together out of wedlock and of children born to single mothers.

Attitudes towards homosexuality have been slower to change, some of this caused by ignorance and a confusion about pedophilia within the Catholic Church exposed in the 1990s, so unfortunately sometimes gays are seen as dangerous to children. Cities have gay pubs and clubs, publications, help lines and a general acceptance, but in quieter areas of the Republic there is still prejudice. Gay visitors should not worry, as tourists are accepted and not expected to have the same mores as residents. Whatever your sexuality, be sensible about how you behave in public, especially rural areas.

◆ Fun & Pride

The Irish have a huge appetite for fun (or *craic*, pronounced "crack"), and great pride in their achievements worldwide in such areas as sports, music, and literature. Sports are a passion with most of us – especially the **GAA** (Gaelic Athletic Association) games of hurling and Gaelic football. Soccer is equally popular, particularly since the Republic qualified for the World Cup in the 90s. English soccer teams have thousands of supporters in Ireland.

◆ Music

All types of music are popular, from classical to hard rock. The main classical performing groups are the **National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland** and the **Ulster Orchestra**. Opera always attracts big audiences, and the annual festival in Wexford is internationally renowned.

Traditional music is played in many pubs. Sometimes they're organized sessions, others are impromptu and anyone who can play is welcome to join in. Instruments include the *bodhrán*, (a hand-held drum made from goatskin), the fiddle, tin whistle, accordion, the mandolin, and the spoons. (Yes, they are ordinary spoons, but, in the hands of someone who can play them, they give a great sound.) Sessions often include unaccompanied singing. Go at least once.

Irish dancing has also experienced a renaissance since the eruption of *Riverdance* on the scene in 1994. Conceived as an interval act

for the Eurovision Song Contest, the combination of music by Limerick-born Bill Whelan and the performance of a troupe of dancers led by Irish-Americans Jean Butler and Michael Flatley, it was the most exciting performance of Irish dancing most of us had ever seen. The show continues to tour the world.

◆ A Nation of Writers

The Irish are renowned for writing – from the early Christian period when we were known as "the island of saints and scholars" there's been a fascination with the written word, in both Irish and English. The Celtic Revival or Irish Literary Renaissance of the late 19th and early 20th century was a reminder of how the country has a culture distinct from Britain. The leading writers of that period included WB Yeats, playwright John Millington Synge (*The Playboy of the Western World*) and George Moore.

Ulysses by James Joyce (1882-1941) is considered one of the most innovative novels of the 20th century. Leading poets include the late Louis MacNeice and Patrick Kavanagh, and Seamus Heaney, John Montague and Thomas Kinsella. Leading prose writers include Flann O'Brien, Elizabeth Bowen, Frank O'Connor, John McGahern and Roddy Doyle (who won the Booker Prize), and William Trevor.

◆ Theater

The **Abbey** was founded during the Celtic Revival and is the **National Theatre of Ireland**. There's a huge amateur drama movement all over the island, and a number of small professional companies tour the many venues. Talented contemporary dramatists, including Brian Friel, Conor McPherson, Marie Jones, and Martin McDonagh, are following in the footsteps of Oliver Goldsmith, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw and Sean O'Casey. Samuel Beckett, both novelist and dramatist, was one of the most influential writers anywhere in the 20th century.

NOBEL PRIZE WINNERS: George Bernard Shaw, Samuel Beckett, and poets WB Yeats and Seamus Heaney were all awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

◆ Visual Arts

There are hundreds of galleries and a network of arts centers where you'll see works by contemporary artists; most can be visited for free. Pay a visit to the **Ulster Museum** in Belfast and the **National Gallery** in Dublin to see art produced in previous centuries. Also look for public sculptures as you travel around the country.

◆ Film

The Irish love the cinema, and attendance grows year after year. There are art-house cinemas in cities on both sides of the border, and several annual festivals. The **Cork Film Festival**, one of the oldest anywhere, celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2005.

With the wonderful locations it offers, and many trained crew and talented actors, it's no wonder that Ireland is often used by film-makers from overseas. Many of the biggest names in cinema have worked here, including Hitchcock, Ford, Huston and Spielberg.

Our native film industry thrives – directors Jim Sheridan and Neil Jordan are Oscar winners and among our successful screen actors are Liam Neeson, Pierce Brosnan, Colin Farrell and Cillian Murphy.

◆ Language

English is the official spoken language of Ireland. Irish is also used all over the island, though spoken with varying degrees of proficiency. In the Republic it was made a compulsory subject at school – which was counter-productive. It is only in recent years that most people have developed an enthusiasm for the language and its distinct culture, and in the Republic there are now many all-Irish schools. Many people use some Irish words in conversation, and there is an Irish language radio station and television station, TG4, its programs subtitled in English.

I've never heard anyone ever say "Begorrah" or "Top of the morning to you" except on screen or as a joke!

Native Irish-speaking Areas

Gaeltachts are areas where the Irish language is still spoken and where residents are given financial incentives by the government for

its promotion and for the preservation of our cultural heritage. Every summer thousands of Irish teenagers stay in *Gaeltachts* to learn the language – they are sent home if caught speaking English!

There are sizeable *Gaeltacht* areas in Co. Donegal; Connemara, Co. Galway; Ring, Co. Waterford; and in Co. Meath. Also, Ballyvourney, Cuil Aodh (Coolea) and Cape Clear Island, which you can reach from Baltimore, all in West Cork, and Dingle, Ballyferriter and Dunchaoin (Dunquin) in Kerry. If you're interested, contact them at: ☎ (66) 915-2423 from overseas; info@gaelsaoire.ie; www.gaelsaoire.ie.

Road signs and the names on shops are in Irish in *Gaeltacht* areas. You'll hear the language spoken, but residents don't expect tourists to be able to answer! They also have pubs with traditional music sessions and *céilís* (literally translated as "dance gatherings").

A céilí is great fun and visitors are encouraged to get up and dance. Often someone calls out directions for the dances, or you'll be helped by partners. The dances have titles, such as the Siege of Limerick or The Walls of Ennis. Go if you get the chance. The best are those attended by locals, rather than those organized with overseas visitors in mind.

Ulster-Scots

Many, even among the Irish themselves, see the island as having only two languages and traditions, but this is incorrect. Northern Ireland has another distinct heritage, which is experiencing a huge revival of interest since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. The agreement established the Ulster-Scots Agency as part of the North-South Language Body.

In the 1600s tens of thousands of Scots crossed the very narrow channel of the Irish Sea, which separates the two countries, and settled in Antrim and further afield. The majority of them spoke not Gaelic or English, but Scots, a Germanic language closely related to English. Its descendant is Ulster-Scots, also known as Ullans.

The **Ulster-Scots Agency** has produced a fascinating series of free publications that include details of its legacy in the United States. They can be contacted at 10-12 Brunswick Street, Belfast, ☎ (028)

9023 1113; fax 9023 1898; info@ulsterscotsagency.org.uk; www.ulsterscotsagency.com.

IRISH WORDS IN PLACE NAMES

Togher	track
Clon or cloon, from cluain	meadow
Curragh	grassy plain
Charraig	rock
Creagan	rocky place
Coill	woodland
Doire	oak wood
Tubber	sacred well
Inis	island
Clar	plain
Cnoc	hill
Dun	fort
Ri	king
Ard	high
Cil	church
Beg	little
Mor	big

◆ Myths & Legends

Two significant Irish legends are the *Children of Lir* and the *Táin*. You'll enjoy visiting sites associated with them if you know the stories.

The Children of Lir

Lir, a chieftain of the Tuatha de Danann tribe, married the beautiful Eva, daughter of King Bov the Red, and they were very happy. When Eva died young, Lir survived his broken heart only because of his love for their four children. He eventually married again, but his new wife Aoife (the

Irish for Eve, pronounced "eefa") became insanely jealous of her stepchildren.

One day, when Lir was out hunting, she took the children to the shores of Lough (Lake) Derravaragh, where she cast a spell on them, turning them into swans, and condemning them to stay there for 300 years. After the 300 years passed, they spent another 300 years on the Sea of Moyle and a further 300 on Inis Glora in the Atlantic.

By then Saint Patrick had arrived in Ireland and was preaching about Christ. One of his followers, Kemoc, prayed with the children of Lir. As he did so, their white feathers fell away and he saw a very old woman and three ancient men. He baptised them. When they died they were buried in one grave as they wished. As Kemoc knelt to pray at their graveside, four beautiful white swans took flight for the heavens.

The Táin Trail

The Táin Trail, a cycling or driving route, takes in a number of sites, some associated with events in the epic story *The Táin* (see next page). It covers approximately 365 miles/585 km from Rathcroghan, Co. Roscommon, in the west, where the Royal Palace of Queen Maeve stood. It goes across the middle of the country to the Cooley peninsula, and back again. There's a trail map/guide available from tourist offices that lists recommended accommodations.There's a marvelous translation of the epic from Irish by Thomas Kinsella, with brush drawings by Louis le Brocquy, published by Oxford University Press – look for a copy.

History

◆ Prehistory

There are traces of food-gatherers and hunters dating back to the Mesolithic period, around 8000 BC, but the first inhabitants who left signs of buildings and boundary walls were Neolithic peoples, who arrived 6,000 years ago from Britain or Europe to grow crops and breed livestock. They are responsible for the many megalithic monuments, including dolmens, court-cairns and passage-tombs, dotting the landscape today.

The Bronze Age, from about 2500 to 600 BC, saw the exploitation of Ireland's rich deposits of copper and left a legacy of bronze axe and spearheads, shields, cauldrons and tools. The most beautiful are those made for personal ornament, often in gold and a half-moon shape, including earrings, dress fasteners, and jewelry for the neck or hair. Stone circles and wedge tombs were built in this period.

The first Celtic people appeared during the Iron Age after 600 BC. Large enclosures on hills, such as the one at Tara, Co. Meath, and some cliff-top promontory forts date from this time. You will also see many ring-forts, which were established by wealthy farmers. They were called "raths" if they had earthen banks, or "cashels" if they had stone walls.

The Táin

Its full title is ***Táin Bó Cúailgne*** – the *Cattle Raid of Cooley*. This tale is at the center of the Ulster Cycle of heroic tales, parts of which date from the eighth century, with some passages probably composed 200 years later, and considered Ireland's greatest epic. It tells the story of a cattle raid, the invasion of Ulster by the armies of Queen Maeve and King Ailill of Connacht and their allies, as they try to carry off the great Brown Bull of Cúailnge (Cooley).

One night Queen Maeve and her husband compare possessions; he owns a great white bull called Finnbennach, which only the great Brown Bull can equal, so she sets off with her armies determined to return with the Brown Bull. Cúchulainn – the greatest of all Celtic heroes, who guards the Bull and the lands of Ulster – stands in her way, but his warriors have fallen asleep under a spell. There are many battles before Maeve eventually captures the Bull and sets off home, but the Ulster warriors wake and defeat her armies. The white and brown bulls fight, and both are killed.

◆ The Arrival of Christianity

The first written records are documents ascribed to the missionary Saint Patrick in the fifth century. A substantial body of literature survives from that time in both Latin and Irish – including annals, genealogies, and king lists. By the middle of the sixth century, monasteries had become centers of learning and art, where the Bible was studied, and manuscripts

were copied, many of them beautifully illuminated. This was the time that Ireland became known as "the island of saints and scholars," when missionaries and teachers traveled to Britain and throughout Europe.

Law tracts from the seventh and eighth centuries give a good idea of society at that time, a hierarchy of kings, clerics and poets, the free and enslaved. The country was never united politically, although 150 or so minor kingdoms shared a common culture. Kings ruled locally, there were over-kings who ruled a number of areas, and then others ruling a province. The Uí Néill (O'Neills), the leading dynasty for much of the period, were based in the northern half of Ireland, with their capital at Tara. They lost power in the early 11th century and then a number kings jostled for the position of High King.

◆ The Vikings

Viking invaders started making incursions from the ninth century on and looked likely to take over the country. They founded towns at Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Wexford, and developed trading networks overseas. Brian Boru is famous for his victory over them at the Battle of Clontarf in 1014, but his main importance is that he ended the monopoly of the Uí Néills as High Kings. Eventually, the Viking enclaves were assimilated and Irish kings who dominated them gained an advantage over their rivals.

◆ The Anglo-Norman Invasion

The first attempts to unite the island politically began with the Anglo-Norman invasion of 1170, which happened because they had been invited! Over the next 700 years, the island was ruled with varying degrees of success by the English (later the British) Crown.

Leading those first arrivals was the Earl of Pembroke, Richard de Clare, known as Strongbow. He landed in Co. Wexford with his army, invited into the country by Dermot MacMurrough, the King of Leinster, who had lost his throne to his rival high-king Rory O'Connor. Later, Strongbow married Aoife (Eve), daughter of MacMurrough, and became King of Leinster.

In late 1171 King Henry II arrived with a large force and colonization increased. The invaders would build a large mound of raised earth surrounded by a fence, with a wooden tower on top. This primitive

castle, known as a motte, was easy to defend and was used as a base for raiding the lands of the local Irish king. When the king was beaten, his land was shared among the invader's supporters. Military conquest was followed by the introduction of the agricultural system used in England, based on the manor, and peasants and artisans were encouraged to come to Ireland. Impressive castles replaced the wooden towers.

New towns sprang up all over the island, and today what remains of their walls and castles are a reminder of that period of economic boom in the 13th century. They include Kilkenny, Clonmel, Carrick, Carlow and New Ross in the southeast, Kinsale and Youghal in Co. Cork, Tralee in Kerry, Drogheda, Dundalk, Ardee, and Trim, all north of Dublin, and Carrickfergus in Co. Antrim. Sligo, Galway, Athenry, Nenagh, Athlone, Roscommon and Mullingar were also founded by the English during this period.

There's a famous painting by Daniel Maclise depicting the marriage of Aoife and Strongbow in the National Gallery, Dublin, which is huge and well worth a look.

◆ Beyond the Pale

Henry VIII
(Portrait by Holbein)

Resistance to the invader continued and, by the late 15th century, the power of the English monarch was restricted to a small area around Dublin. In order to protect it, a line of fortifications called the *Pale* was built and the Irish outside it were regarded as savages. The expression "beyond the pale," still used today, survives from that period.

In 1541 **Henry VIII** changed his title from Lord of Ireland to King of Ireland, the first English monarch to claim the whole island. When his daughter, the Protestant Elizabeth I, succeeded him in 1558 there was a huge increase in religious differences with the Catholic Irish, leading to a number of rebellions during her reign. The greatest of them was led by **Hugh O'Neill**, the Earl of Tyrone, who defeated the English at the Yellow Ford in 1598. Yellow

Ford is 15 miles (24 km) from Drumcree, the center of intense intercommunal conflict every July to this day.

In 1601 Spanish troops landed at Kinsale, Co. Cork, and O'Neill marched to support them. The Battle of Kinsale marked the end of Gaelic Ireland, when O'Neill's men were decisively beaten by the English forces under Lord Mountjoy. O'Neill surrendered after Elizabeth offered him a pardon.

◆ The Flight of the Earls

Faced with growing English influence, O'Neill and the Earl of Tyrconnell, Rory O'Donnell, and their families (a total of 99 men, women and children) left Ireland in 1607. Their destination was Spain, but storms drove them ashore in France. When they eventually reached Spanish Flanders, they discovered that Philip of Spain had made peace with King James and wouldn't help them recover their lands. The departure of the Gaelic nobles marked the end of an era and was a cultural disaster.

WHAT YOU CAN SEE NOW

The **Flight of the Earls Heritage Center** at Rathmullan, from where the Earls embarked, and the **Donegal Ancestry, Heritage Exhibition and Genealogy Center**, is not far away in Ramelton, both in Co. Donegal. Over the border in Northern Ireland, visit the award-winning **Tower Museum** to learn all about the Siege of Derry. Travel on from there to the **Ulster Plantation Center** in Draperstown, see the miniature villages and Manor Lodge at **Moneymore** and **Bellaghy Bawn** a few miles away. For full details, contact The Ulster Plantation Center, 50 High Street, Draperstown, ☎ (028) 7962-7800; fax 7962-7732; info@theflightoftheearls.com; www.theflightoftheearls.com.

◆ The Plantation of Ulster

In 1609 began the systematic colonization, known as the Plantation of Ulster, at the time the most ambitious ever undertaken. Confiscated land in the counties of Donegal, Tyrone, Derry, Armagh, Cavan and Fermanagh were divided into precincts and then subdivided. They were given to the following: "servitors" – army commanders and the King's servants; "undertakers" – men of property who undertook

to bring over Protestants from England and Scotland; and "deserving Irish" – those who had changed sides before the Earl's rebellion.

The town of Virginia in Cavan and the state of Virginia in America were founded at this time.

The first plantations of Irish lands had taken place earlier in the 1550s, mainly to seize the estates of the rebellious O'Mores and O'Connors on the borders of the Pale. Soldier-farmers were settled in Laois and Offaly, now in the Republic, which were renamed Queen's and King's counties.

The native Irish rebelled in 1641-42, killing a reported 12,000 settlers, and reprisals were carried out by an army of Scots led by General Robert Monro.

◆ Oliver Cromwell

King Charles I was executed in 1649 and England was then ruled by Parliament. In Ireland, opposition to this was brutally suppressed by an army led by Cromwell. His name still evokes expressions of disgust, even hatred, in many parts of the country. He carried out massacres at Drogheda and Wexford; thousands of Catholics were resettled or transported abroad (some sent to the island of Monserrat, where Saint Patrick's Day is still celebrated) and their land seized. Although Charles II was restored to the English throne in 1660, the land seizures were left largely untouched.

Oliver Cromwell

◆ The Siege of Derry

William of Orange

In 1688, three years after being crowned, the Catholic King James II fled when **William of Orange**, later William III, landed in England. In Derry, 13 apprentice boys closed the gates of the city on December 7 in the face of Catholic soldiers.

The following year, James landed in Ireland with French troops and marched on Derry, to be met on April 18 with cries of "No surrender!" – a cry echoed in our own time by Ian Paisley and others who resist power-sharing with Catholics or nationalists.

King James laid siege to the city but failed to take it. Then, on July 1, 1690, William defeated him at the Battle of the Boyne and James fled back to France. The supremacy of the Protestants was assured by victory at the Battle of Aughrim in 1691. The Treaty of Limerick in the same year allowed 15,000 Irish soldiers to leave in order to serve France's Louis XIV and promised Catholic toleration, which was not fulfilled. In fact, the Penal Laws excluded them from political life and hindered their economic advancement.

◆ A Peaceful Period

Next came a period of relative peace. During this time, colonists from England and Huguenots from France established the linen industry in Ulster, which grew to be the largest in the world. The great forests that had covered much of the country were cut down, which opened up more land for farming. Ulster, formerly the poorest of the four provinces, became the most prosperous.

Huguenots also settled in other parts of the country, including Cork and Dublin. They are now remembered in an area of Cork City Center and in the Huguenot graveyard at St. Stephen's Green in Dublin.

◆ Political Unrest

The memories of dispossession, massacre and persecution etched into the consciousness of both Protestants and Catholic swas to lead to political and social unrest over the following centuries, right up to the present.

◆ The Penal Laws

Reports in the 1690s that Irish who had fled abroad were encouraging a French invasion, added to an exaggeration of the 1641 "massacres," led to the introduction of anti-Catholic legislation. These measures restricted the freedom to educate their children, to carry arms, to inherit, own, lease or work land, to employ or trade, to enter the main professions, and in 1728 they were denied the vote. Bear in mind that, in 1732, 73% of Irish households were Catholic.

◆ The Georgian Period

The years from 1728 to 1793 mark the high point of Protestant ascendancy – when many Palladian and neo-classical houses and beautifully landscaped demesnes were created. Estate villages were also laid out at this time. The ruling class was committed to the island's economic development and built a road network, constructed canals, and drained rivers. Limerick, Cork and Waterford grew substantially and the Wide Streets Commissioners transformed Dublin, sweeping away the crowded medieval streets. Fine new public buildings and wide thoroughfares linking elegant Georgian squares made it one of the most attractive cities of the period. Between 1692 and 1785 the Irish Parliament raised revenue and made laws.

◆ The 1798 Rebellion

The 18th century was a period of prosperity for some, but sectarian unrest continued. In the 1780s, a group called the Catholic Defenders was formed in Co. Armagh to resist raids by Protestants, and in 1791, when the United Irishmen was founded in Belfast and Dublin, they joined them. The United Irishmen brought together Protestants, Dissenters and Catholics, initially in the hope of bringing about reforms, including Catholic emancipation. At first the British government reformed some of the Penal Laws, but that ended when, in 1793, war broke out between revolutionary France and Britain. The National Assembly in Paris promised the assistance of France to all nations seeking freedom, and Theobald Wolf Tone went there to seek help for the Irish cause.

In December, 1796, French troops arrived off Bantry Bay, Co. Cork; only bad weather prevented the landing and saved Britain from de-

feat. After that, Irish society was polarized as many joined the British army and the United Irishmen's numbers swelled. By the Spring of 1798 a campaign of British terror was destroying the United Irishmen and many of its leaders had been arrested, including Theobald Wolf Tone and Robert Emmet. Those still free called an immediate rising before French aid could arrive. There were major rebellions in Wexford in the southeast and Antrim and Down in the north. Tens of thousands took part. There were minor skirmishes elsewhere, especially around Dublin.

After the defeat of the main risings, a small French Army landed on the west coast at Killala, Co. Mayo, in August. Thousands joined them and they succeeded in inflicting one major defeat on the British. By autumn, the rebellion had been brutally defeated, and many thousands killed.

THE LAMBEG DRUM

The first time the giant drum was seen in Ireland was with the Dutch Guards Regiment accompanying King William on his way to the Boyne in 1690. Between then and 1795 the tradition of the drum survived in individual families and various Williamite societies. When the Orange Order was founded the drums provided a link with King William, and ever since have been used in marches. The drum got its name from the village where they were made for many years. Over the last 20 years regular drumming matches have taken place, the largest in Markethill, Co. Armagh, on the last Saturday in July, when 50-60 drummers take part. The Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland, Schomberg House, 368 Cregagh Road, Belfast, BT6 9YE, ☎ (028) 9070-1122, fax 9040-3700.

◆ Catholic Emancipation & Daniel O'Connell

Although 1778-92 had seen the repeal of much anti-Catholic legislation, Catholics still could not sit in Parliament. The successful barrister Daniel O'Connell, born in Derrynane, Co. Kerry, founded the Catholic Association in 1823 and in the general election of 1826 Catholics voted for Members of Parliament sympathetic to their cause. In 1828 O'Connell won a by-election in Co. Clare but couldn't take his seat in Parliament until two years later when Catholics were emancipated.

O'Connell, known as the Liberator, then launched a campaign to repeal the Act of Union, supported by the Young Irelanders and the Church, and in 1843 organized huge meetings around the country. He was imprisoned when the one planned for Clontarf in Dublin was declared illegal.

◆ Emigration

In the 18th century most emigrants to America were Ulster-Scots from what is now Northern Ireland, who saw opportunities in the colonies. Starting small, their numbers rose to about 50,000 a year in the 1770s. The American War of Independence interrupted the process, but by 1827 they were up to 20,000 a year again, reaching 65,000 in 1831-32 and averaging that number until 1845.

Others were attracted to Britain, where the industrial revolution of the early 19th century meant more work opportunities. There were already significant numbers of Irish in most British cities by 1800, and they quickly increased. Between the 1780s and 1845, 50-65,000 Irish felons were transported to Australia, a minority of them political prisoners.

◆ The Great Famine

Most people have only heard of the Great Famine of 1845, but in fact there were 16 food crises, starting in the period from 1800.

Famine Wall

When an incurable fungal disease attacked the potato crop in 1845, it was a disaster for the rural poor, who depended on the potato as their staple. Relief from official and private sources was woefully inadequate. Between 1845-49, roughly one million died. Another million emigrated, and the population dropped to 6.5 million.

The Great Famine left a memory in the Irish psyche of a tragedy that could have been avoided. The country was still exporting grain while its people literally died on the roadsides as wagons passed them on their way to the ports.

Relief was sometimes given only if the starving peasantry would "earn" it by working – which is why there are **famine walls** and **roads** in some parts, including those in Mourne and in Fermoy, Co. Cork. Many others were taken into workhouses, where families were split up, and the meanest landlords evicted tenants who couldn't pay their rents. In 1999, the centenary of the Famine, Prime Minister of Britain Tony Blair apologized for British mishandling of the situation.

THE FAMINE WALK

In Co. Mayo in March 1849, several hundred starving people set out on a desperate walk from Louisburgh to Doolough, struggling across 10 miles (16 km) of windswept boggy moors and treacherous mountain slopes. They were heading for a mansion where dinner was being served to the Board of Guardians, who had the powers to release food or issue certificates of destitution so the poor could enter the workhouse. The Louisburgh people were denied both. So they turned and headed home. On the way back about 100 men, women and children died. In 1841 the Choctaw Indians in Mississippi were forced from their homelands to journey hundreds of miles to Oklahoma, many of them dying on the way in what became the Trail of Tears. In April 1847 the Choctaw Indians sent money to a famine relief fund in Ireland, reported in *The Arkansas Intelligencer*. Every May there's a Famine Walk from Doolough to Louisburgh, often joined by one of the Choctaw Nation, and well-known campaigners for human rights. On the monument erected by AFRI (Aid from Ireland) in 1994 an inscription reads: "In 1991 we walked AFRI's great famine walk at Doolough and soon afterwards we walked the road to freedom in South Africa." (Archbishop Desmond Tutu)

◆ Late 19th Century

A number of individuals and groups continued to contribute to the growth of political and cultural nationalism, while among Protestants the desire to maintain the Union (with Britain) gained in popularity. In the 1840s the Young Ireland movement, whose Thomas Davis edited the newspaper *The Nation*, agitated for reform. The Irish Parliamentary Party in London, led first by Isaac Butt and then by Charles Stewart Parnell, made some gains. A revolutionary wing to the nationalist

movement, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, known as the Fenians, emerged.

The government introduced some reforms, including the Land Acts, transferring ownership from landlord to tenant, disestablished the Church of Ireland, and set up agencies to develop poor areas. These were not enough and agitation for independence continued. The Liberal Prime Minister Gladstone twice tried to introduce a Home Rule bill, which was defeated by the Conservatives and Unionists.

◆ A Nation Once Again

Culturally, the Irish were developing their own identity. The **Gaelic Athletic Association** was founded in 1884, dedicated to traditional Irish sports, and in 1893 the **Gaelic League** was established with the aim of halting the decline of the language. It was the time too of the Irish Literary Renaissance, when a new pride was discovered in a culture distinct from Britain. In 1905, Sinn Féin (We Ourselves) was founded.

◆ The Ulster Question

A campaign of opposition to Home Rule was led by Edward Carson and James Craig from 1912-14, and included the signing of the Solemn League and Covenant, the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force, and gun-running into Larne. It was concentrated in Ulster, where there was the greatest number of Protestants. The National Volunteers were formed to oppose them.

The outbreak of war in Europe in 1914 halted developments, as the Home Rule bill was suspended until its end. Ulster receiving special treatment, and its nine counties excluded from the bill, was opposed by nationalists.

◆ The 1916 Rising

Led by inspirational figures, including Padraig Pearse and James Connolly, the Easter Rising was poorly planned, and a disaster for the Volunteers, with high casualties and the survivors interned. The insurrection lasted only six days, but its effects were far-reaching. The British, by executing its leaders, created martyrs who inspired others to follow them.

◆ The War of Independence

In 1918 Sinn Féin had a huge victory in the General Election, except in Ulster. *Dáil Eireann*, a republican assembly, was founded the following year and a guerilla war started by the IRA. The British government reacted by recruiting ruthlessly aggressive units, called the Black and Tans because of their uniforms, to fight against them. It was another tactical mistake, as it lessened the government's moral authority in the eyes of the world.

There was a truce in 1921, following the formal partitioning of the country and the establishment of Northern Ireland, and a negotiating team went to London, led by Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith.

◆ The Civil War

The Treaty signed in December 1921 was unacceptable to many republicans – Collins remarked afterwards that he'd signed his own death warrant, which proved sadly true – as they felt it did not fully recognize the country's independence. Éamon de Valera, leader of the underground government during the War of Independence, was prominent among the dissenters. Civil War erupted in June 1922 and there was unrest for a year, with leading figures on both sides killed.

Treaty supporters under WT Cosgrave formed the first *Cumann na nGaedheal* (Fine Gael) government in 1923. In 1926 De Valera founded his own party, Fianna Fail, which came to power for the first time in 1932.

◆ Historical Timeline

The following is an outline of major historical events, with some details of evidence left on the landscape or in museums and heritage centers.

c. 8000 BC: Mesolithic period – Traces of food gatherers and hunters.

c. 4000 BC: First inhabitants arrive from Britain or Europe – build dolmens, court-cairns, passage tombs.

c. 2500-600 BC: Bronze Age – axes, spearheads, shields, cauldrons and tools, personal gold ornaments; stone circles and wedge tombs.

After 600 BC: Iron Age – first Celtic people arrive, build large hillside enclosures such as Tara, County Meath; cliff-top promontory forts; and ring-forts called *raths* (with earthen banks) or *cashels* (stone walls).

c. 500 AD: Arrival of Christianity with missionary St Patrick – first written records in Irish and Latin.

Mid-6th century: Monasteries are centers of learning and art – creation of the *Book of Kells*; Ireland known as "island of saints and scholars," sending missionaries throughout Europe. Country ruled locally by kings, leading dynasty the *Uí Néills* (O'Neills) based at Tara.

9th century: Viking invasion – founded Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Waterford, Wexford and established trading networks overseas. Brian Boru defeated them at Battle of Clontarf (1014), broke power of O'Neills – Vikings gradually assimilated.

1170: Anglo-Norman Invasion – Ireland ruled by English (later British) for following 700 years.

Late 15th century: Power of English monarch restricted to area around Dublin, fortifications built called the Pale, Irish outside it seen as savage – hence the expression "beyond the pale" still used today.

1607: Flight of the Earls – departure of Gaelic nobles for Europe.

1609: Plantation of Ulster – confiscated land given to Protestants from England and Scotland.

1649: King Charles I executed, England ruled by Parliament. Cromwell arrives in Ireland, massacres Catholics, gives their land to his Protestant soldiers, and sells their children as slaves in Barbados.

1688: The Siege of Derry – 13 apprentice boys close gate of city against Catholic soldiers of King James II, who fled when Protestant William of Orange landed in England.

1690: The Battle of the Boyne – William defeats James II.

1690-1728: The Penal Laws, anti-Catholic legislation, introduced, restricting rights and freedoms.

1728-1793: Irish Parliament raises revenue and made laws – high point of Protestant Ascendancy, estate villages, neoclassical buildings, landscaped demesnes created 1798

Rebellion – United Irishmen brought together Protestants, Catholics and Dissenters, aided by France, brutally suppressed – leaders including Theobald Wolf Tone and Robert Emmet executed.

1823-30: Catholic Emancipation achieved – movement led by Daniel O'Connell (the Liberator).

1845-49: The Great Famine – one million died, one million emigrated – memory in Irish psyche of an avoidable tragedy; many taken into dreaded workhouses, where families divided, meanest landlords forcibly evicted tenants.

1840s: Young Ireland Movement founded to agitate for reform; Irish Parliamentary Party makes some gains; Irish Republican Brotherhood, (the Fenians) emerges.

1884: Foundation of Gaelic Athletic Association, dedicated to traditional sports.

1893: The Gaelic League established to halt decline of language.

1905: *Sinn Féin* (We Ourselves) founded.

1912-14: Campaign of opposition in North to Home Rule, led by Edward Carson and James Craig, Ulster Volunteer Force founded – National Volunteers formed to oppose them.

1914: Outbreak of World War I, Home Rule Bill suspended.

1916: Easter Rising in Dublin – insurrection a disaster for the Volunteers, but the British, by excecuting leaders including Padraig Pearse, created martyrs who inspired others.

1918: Sinn Féin triumphs in General Election, except in Ulster.

1919: War of Independence – *Dáil Eireann*, republican assembly, founded, guerilla war started by IRA, British recruit ruthless units to fight them – called Black and Tans because of uniforms.

1921: Truce follows partition of country, establishing Northern Ireland. Negotiating team travels to London, led by Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith. Treaty signed in December – unacceptable to many Republicans including Éamon de Valera, leader of underground government.

1922: Civil War erupts.

1923: Treaty supporters form first *Cumann na nGaedheal* (Fine Gael) government.

1926: De Valera founds *Fianna Fail* party – comes to power for first time in 1932.

The Land

The island is strategically located on major air and sea routes between North America and northern Europe. It has been divided into four provinces for centuries: Ulster, Connaught, Leinster and Munster. Part of Ulster is in the Republic – which can be confusing for visitors.

The Republic is slightly larger than West Virginia, with a total area of 26,706 square miles (70,280 sq km), of which 26,178 square miles (68,890 sq km) is land and 528 square miles (1,390 sq km) is water.

Northern Ireland is about the size of Connecticut and is part of the United Kingdom (UK) of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It covers 5,500 square miles (14,300 square km), is about 85 miles (137 km) from north to south and 110 miles (177 km) wide. In the middle is Lough Neagh, the largest lake in the British Isles.

◆ Climate

Ireland's climate is temperate maritime, moderated by the Gulf Stream, which brings warm waters from the Caribbean, and prevailing southwesterly winds.

- *Summer 57-61°F (14-16°C)*
- *Winter 39-45°F (4-7°C)*

Temperatures below 25°F (-4°C) are rare. The weather can be unpredictable, with wonderful warm or sunny days at the most unexpected times and sudden heavy rain showers.

The mean annual temperature is around 50ºF (10ºC). In winter only occasionally does the temperature drop to below 32ºF (0ºC) and snow is infrequent. The warmest months are July and August, with daytime temperatures ranging from 59 to 68ºF (15ºC-20ºC). A hot day in summertime could produce temperatures of 72-75ºF (22ºC-24ºC) and, on rare occasions, as high as 86ºF (30ºC).

Rainfall

Annual rainfall is about 43 inches (1,100 mm) and is well distributed throughout the year. It varies from 30 inches (750 mm) in parts of the east to between 40 and 50 inches (1,000-1,250 mm) in the west, with mountainous districts exceeding 80 inches (2,000 mm). Ireland really is the Emerald Isle – with grass that shade of green because of the consistent humidity. Clouds drift in from the Atlantic all year round and often give the landscape, especially along the west, a misty dream-like appearance – referred to by residents as a "soft day."

◆ Terrain

Most of the island is level, with a rolling interior plain surrounded by rugged hills and low mountains. There are sea cliffs along the west coast, including **Slieve League** in Co. Donegal, the highest in Europe, and the spectacular **Cliffs of Moher** in Co. Clare. The highest points on the island are **Carrauntoohil** in Co. Kerry (3,414 feet/1,041 m) and **Slieve Donard**, in the Mourne Mountains of Co. Down in the North (2,795 feet/852 m).

◆ Flora & Fauna

The island was separated from mainland Europe after the last great Ice Age, so it has a narrow range of flora and fauna. Native flora is temperate zone, with over 900 species of flowering plants, conifers and ferns. Most of the island is covered by grassland or peatland. Large areas of Clare, Galway and Mayo are limestone outcrops, and elsewhere there are ridges of limestone gravel, with scrubby woodland dominated by hazel, and sometimes ash and yew. Alder is another common tree, and there is a lot of holly, ivy and gorse. Of particular interest are tropical species in the southwest, and Arctic Alpine reminders of the Ice Age as well as Mediterranean species in the unique Burren in Co. Clare.

In the countryside you are likely to see rabbits and hares, squirrels, sometimes hedgehogs, foxes, badgers, and the non-native mink.

There's a lot of fascinating detail about flora on www.habitas.org.uk/flora.

◆ Natural Resources

There's natural gas off the coast and base-metal exploration over the past 40 years has led to discoveries, particularly of zinc-lead, of which the Republic is the largest European producer. Zinc-lead is mined at Navan, Galmoy and Lisheen.

Boglands

There are three main kinds of bogland – raised, blanket and mountain – each with a distinctive flora. Most raised bogs are in the central plain, and the largest are harvested by Bórd na Móna (the peat development authority) for fuel. There is a range of bog-moss species, as well as heathers and sedges.

Most blanket bogs are near the west coast, covering large areas. They have developed on gentle slopes with high rainfall, and vegetation includes moor grass and sedge. Mountain bogs resemble blanket bogs.

TURF/PEAT

There are limited resources of coal, but significant reserves of peat in bogs. Peat, usually known as turf, is used both for electricity generation and for domestic heating. It has a distinctive smell, which you'll either love or hate. Bord na Móna, a State company, was established in 1946, and supplies about 10% of the Republic's energy. It also produces compressed turf in manageable blocks called peat briquettes, used by families for heating. Its moss peat is extensively used by the horticulture sector and a large export market has been developed.

Renewable Energy Sources

Only about 2% of the Republic's energy requirement is provided by renewable energy technologies. The largest contributors are the Electricity Supply Board's hydroelectric schemes and biomass, particularly wood. The Republic's first wind farms are on blanket bog at Bellacorrick, Co. Mayo, and at Carnsore Point, Co. Wexford. In 1996 the Irish govern-

ment launched a €126.97 million renewable energy initiative, supported by the European Regional Development Fund. Among its objectives is a wave energy plant.

◆ Agriculture

Although there's been a gradual decline in the relative importance of agriculture over the last few decades, it remains one of the most important sectors in the Irish economy, on both sides of the border.

In the Republic, farms tend to be larger on the better land in the east and south of the country. With mild temperatures and relatively high rainfall, conditions are ideal for stock raising, so livestock husbandry dominates production. Land use in the Republic in the 1990s was: arable, 13%; pastures, 68%; forests and woodland, 5%; other, 14%.

FARM SHOWS

In rural areas agricultural shows are held annually during the summer, and they give you some idea of life in the country. Animals are paraded and judged, often there are jumping events for horses, as well as displays of produce – from cakes to vegetables. There are lots of competitions you can watch or join in, and other entertainment. All over Ireland there are working farms open to the public, well worth visiting. Look for signs as you travel around, or ask at Tourist Information offices.

◆ Forestry

From being densely forested, the country lost most of its trees during the 17th century. Since the 1950s efforts have been made to redress this in the Republic through a program of reforestation sponsored by the State, with about 70% of forests in public ownership. There's an "open forest" policy that provides public access.

For information about forests in the Republic, check www.coillte.ie and, in Northern Ireland, the **Royal Forestry Society** at www.rfs.org.uk.

ORGANIZING FOR NATURE

Irish Seal Sanctuary, An Clochan, Tobergregan, Garretstown, Co. Dublin, ☎ (01) 835-4370. **Tree Council of Ireland**, The Park, Cabinteely, Dublin 18. ☎ (01) 284-9211; fax 284-9197, www.treecouncil.ie; for the North, www.treecouncil.org.uk. **Coillte, The Irish Forestry Board**, Leeson Lane, Dublin 2. ☎ (01) 661-5666, fax 678-9527, www.coillte.ie. **Bird Watch Ireland**, www.birdwatch.ie; **Birdwatch Northern Ireland**, www.birdwatch-ni.co.uk.

Government

The island is divided politically, with the Republic occupying five sixths of it, split into 26 counties. Northern Ireland is made up of six counties – Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry/Derry and Tyrone.

What is now the Republic became the **Irish Free State** in 1922, while the six counties in the north remained under the jurisdiction of the UK, ratified by the Boundary Commission in 1929.

With nationalists forming a substantial minority within the borders of the six counties, there were tensions that have developed into violence now and then over the years. They came to a head in 1969 when peaceful Civil Rights marches, inspired by contemporary events in the United States, were attacked by the police. This led to what became known as The Troubles.

The Republic

In 1937 the Irish Free State declared itself a Republic in 1948 and adopted a written constitution. It is a parliamentary democracy governed by the *Oireachtas*, which consists of the President and the Legislature. The Legislature has two houses – *Dáil Éireann* (a house of representatives) and *Seanad Éireann* (a senate or upper house). The Head of State is the President, elected by the people every seven years, and whose role is non-executive.

The head of government is the *Taoiseach* (Chieftain in Irish) or Prime Minister, and general elections, organized under a proportional representative system, have to be held at least every five years.

The main political parties in the Republic are: Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, Labour, Progressive Democrats, Sinn Féin, The Green Party, and The Socialist Party.

Northern Ireland

In the North the political situation is more complicated. Voters return Members of Parliament to Westminster, London, although Sinn Féin MPs do not take up their seats. The British government appoints a Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and runs the Northern Ireland Office in Belfast.

Under the Good Friday (or Belfast) Agreement of 1998 voters also elect MLAs, Members of the Legislative Assembly, which sits at Stormont.

In May, 1998, there were referenda on both sides of the border in order to ratify the Agreement, which was supported by over 90% in the Republic and over 70% in the North. The subtleties of its text left some areas ambiguous or unresolved, which have caused difficulties in its full implementation.

Also under the Agreement, North-South bodies and a British-Irish Council were set up, which have increased co-operation between the two parts of the island, and between Ireland and Britain. Life has however improved dramatically for most in Northern Ireland, with an almost total end to violence.

The main political parties in Northern Ireland are the Ulster Unionist Party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), Sinn Féin, and Democratic Unionist Party.

David Trimble of the Ulster Unionist Party, and John Hume of the nationalist SDLP, were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1998 "for their efforts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict in Northern Ireland."

The Economy

Both Ireland and Britain joined the European Economic Community (now the **European Union**) in 1973. As a result, substantial grants speeded up the modernization in both parts of the island, but especially the Republic. While agriculture is still important in both jurisdictions, tourism and high-tech industries are making substantial inroads.

◆ Industrial Development in the Republic

When the Irish Free State was founded in 1922, industry was made up of a small number of manufacturers – most involved in food, drink and textiles, and focused on the home market. Protectionist measures introduced in the 1930s to encourage expansion didn't work and the country's industrial breakthrough did not come for another two decades.

In 1952 ***Córas Tráchtála***, the Irish Export Board, was founded, and capital incentive schemes encouraged new industries. The IDA (**Industrial Development Authority**) was set up to promote the indigenous sector and also to attract foreign companies. It has been particularly successful in electronics, engineering and pharmaceuticals. Today these are the main industrial employers in the Republic, attracted by substantial State aid.

During the 1990s the Republic emerged as Europe's high-growth economy due to a number of factors. These included a young and educated workforce, State policies encouraging overseas investment and a commitment to open markets, and a partnership approach between government, employers and trade unions. Also, a large number of Irish who had emigrated during previous decades returned home with experience gained abroad, many with capital to invest. Although the UK is still its largest trading partner, the EU accounts for almost half of all of its exports.

◆ Companies from Overseas

There are over 1,100 overseas-owned manufacturing/international services companies in the Republic, including over 450 from the US, 175 from Germany and 160 from the UK. There are also about 100

State-sponsored bodies working in transport, telecommunications and the promotion of tourism, trade and industrial development.

◆ The Republic's Fishing Industry

Commercial sea fishing and fish farming are very important to the economy. The main varieties of sea fish landed are herring, cod, whiting, mackerel, plaice, ray, skate and haddock. Among shellfish, the main varieties are lobsters, crab and prawns. *Bord Iascaigh Mhara* (BIM - Sea Fisheries Board) is the State body with primary responsibility for the development of the sea fishing and aquaculture industries.

Aquaculture now provides employment in remote and disadvantaged areas, having grown from a negligible level in the mid-1980s. There are jobs too in feed and equipment manufacture and in processing. Farmed salmon accounts for about 75% of the value of aquaculture output. BIM's development program is geared towards the expansion of both finfish and shellfish farming.

◆ The Economy of Northern Ireland

Due to its political problems, from the late 1960s, investment levels were poor, which led to high levels of unemployment, with a large number of those employed working in unskilled or skilled manual occupations. Outside Belfast and Derry, Northern Ireland is mainly rural and has a strong agricultural economy, with dairy products and beef most important.

What is encouraging is that, since the '90s, millions of pounds have been invested in the economy by companies convinced that the Peace Process will work. In fact, throughout the 1990s Northern Ireland enjoyed the fastest economic growth of any region of the UK.

Between 1990 and 2000, manufacturing output increased by a staggering 47.7%. Over 90% of new jobs created were in electronics, telecoms and international traded services, including software. The strong growth of these and related sectors indicates a move towards a knowledge-based economy, aided in particular by substantial investments from North American and Japanese companies.

Unemployment is currently running at its lowest level since records began and has fallen steadily from a peak of 17.2% in 1986 to 5.2% in August 2003.

The Good Friday Agreement has led to the transformation of many towns and cities in the North, and there are lots of new hotels and places to eat, drink, and enjoy a vibrant nightlife.

INVESTING IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The body which assists overseas companies interested in locating in the North is **Invest Northern Ireland**. The number of overseas companies setting up has increased, attracted by a well-motivated and highly educated English-speaking workforce. The North has the fastest growing economy in the UK, with a competitive business environment, and an infrastructure that is absolutely top class.

Generous assistance is available through Invest Northern Ireland, including financial incentives and recruitment and training support tailored to each company's needs. Invest NI continues to give support throughout the lifetime of a commercial venture.

Ireland
North Channel
Atlantic Ocean
Derry
The North
M2
Belfast
Donegal
Omagh
Donegal Bay
M1
Enniskillen
Armagh
Sligo
Newry
M1
Irish Sea
The Republic
Dublin
M4
Galway
M50
M7
Galway Bay
Aran Islands
St. George's Channel
Ennis
Shannon
Limerick
Wexford
Tralee
Waterford
Killarney
Cork
Bantry Bay
Bantry
Celtic Sea
N
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80 KM
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Travel Information

When to Visit

Ireland makes a great holiday destination at any time of the year, but the countryside is at its most attractive from April to the end of September.

If you are particularly interested in history and heritage, or attracted by outdoor activities, visiting Ireland from spring to autumn is the best time, as you have access to all sites.

The cities are at their busiest with overseas visitors in July and August, so if you prefer a quiet time, aim to come outside those months.

IN THIS CHAPTER

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Getting Here

◆ By Air

There are scheduled direct flights from the US to Shannon, Dublin and Belfast International Airport in Northern Ireland via Shannon, London and Glasgow. You can also fly from New York to Belfast City Airport via other UK cities. There are also direct flights from Toronto, Quebec and Halifax, and charter flights can be scheduled.

Airlines

AIR TRAVEL FROM USA/CANADA		
From	**To**	**Airline**
Atlanta	Shannon/Dublin	Delta Airlines
Baltimore	Shannon/Dublin	Aer Lingus
Boston	Shannon/Dublin	Aer Lingus
Boston	Shannon	American Airlines
Chicago	Shannon/Dublin	Aer Lingus
Chicago	Dublin	American Airlines
Halifax	Belfast	Zoom
Los Angeles	Shannon/Dublin	Aer Lingus
Newark	Shannon/Dublin	Continental Airlines
Newark	Belfast (via other UK city)	British European (Flybe)
Newark	Belfast	Continental Airlines
New York	Shannon	Aer Lingus
New York	Dublin	Aer Lingus
New York	Belfast	Continental
New York	Cork	Ryan International/ Slattery's Travel (charter)
Philadelphia	Shannon	US Airways
Quebec/Toronto	Shannon/Dublin	Air Canada
Quebec/Toronto	Belfast, via London	Air Canada
Toronto	Belfast	Zoom

Major Airports

IN THE REPUBLIC

Dublin, ☎ (01) 814-1111; www.dublinairport.ie.
Shannon, ☎ (061) 712-400; Lo-call in Republic, ☎ 1890-742-6666; www.shannonairport.ie.
Cork, ☎ (021) 431-3131; www.corkairport.ie.

IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Belfast International, ☎ (028) 9442-2888; www.belfastairport.com.
Belfast City Airport, ☎ (028) 9093-9093; www.belfastcityairport.com.
City of Derry Airport, ☎ (028) 7181-0784; www.derry.net/airport.

You can use other airports in Ireland, including Cork, Waterford, Kerry, Sligo, Galway, Donegal and Derry, by flying through Britain or Europe. For example, fly across the Atlantic to the UK, then use one of the budget or smaller airlines. Internal flights are also available.

AIRLINE CONTACT DETAILS		
American Airlines	www.aa.com	In US, ☎ 800-433-7300 In Ireland, (01) 602-0550
Delta	www.delta.com	In US, ☎ 800-241-4141 In Canada, ☎ 800-221-1212 In Republic (Dublin), ☎ (01) 407-3165 In Republic, ☎ 1800-768-080 In the North, ☎ 0044-232-480-526
US Airways	www.usairways.com	In US, ☎ 800-622-1015 In Ireland, ☎ 1890-925-065
Aer Lingus	www.aerlingus.com	In US, ☎ 1-800-IRISH AIR or 474-7424 In Ireland, ☎ 0818-365-000
Continental Airlines	www.continental.com	In US, ☎ 800-231-0856
British European	www.flybe.com	From outside UK, ☎ (44) 870-889-0908 From the Republic, ☎ 1890-925-532
Air Canada	www.aircanada.com	In Canada/US, ☎ 1-888-247-2262 In Republic; ☎ (01) 679-3958 From Northern Ireland, ☎ 00353-1-679-3958
Slattery's		☎ 066-718-6230 Northern Ireland Callsave, ☎ 0845-300-4309
Zoom Airlines	www.flyzoom.com www.flyzoom.co.uk	In US, ☎ 866-359-9666 In the North, ☎ 0870-240-0055

FLIGHTS FROM THE UK & EUROPE OR WITHIN IRELAND

- **Ryanair**, www.ryanair.com
- **Jetmagic**, www.jetmagic.com
- **easyJet**, www.easyjet.com
- **bmi**, www.flybmi.com
- **British European**, www.flybe.com

If you need special medicines, remember to bring them with you; they will be available in Ireland, but probably under a different name. For minor ailments, chemists or pharmacies can give you useful advice and supply remedies.

◆ By Sea

You can travel to Ireland by sea from the UK, France or Spain. There are services from Pembroke in Wales to Cork and Rosslare; from Hollyhead in Wales and from Liverpool in England to Dublin and Dun Laoghaire. There are also services to Larne and Belfast in Northern Ireland from Stranraer, Cairnryan and Troon, all in Scotland; and Liverpool and Fleetwood, in England.

- P&O Irish Sea, www.poirishsea.com
- Stena Line, www.stenaline.co.uk
- SeaCat, www.seacat.co.uk
- NorseMerchant Ferries, www.norsemerchant.com
- IrishFerries, www.irishferries.com
- Swansea Cork Ferries, www.swansea-cork.ie
- Brittany Ferries, www.brittanyferries.com

Immigration & Customs

◆ Documentation

You need a passport and, if you plan to rent a car, a driving license. You should take out travel insurance before leaving home. Shop around for good value when buying, and check that it gives you medical cover and that all your personal belongings are included.

In Ireland you will receive free medical attention only in an emergency. You'll have to pay for any other treatment and for an overnight stay in a hospital.

b If you need special medicines, remember to bring them with you; they will be available in Ireland, but probably under a different name. For minor ailments, chemists or pharmacies can give you useful advice and supply remedies.

◆ Customs Procedures

Customs operates green and red channels at ports and airports. Go through the green channel if you have nothing to declare over the duty and tax-free allowances for overseas visitors.

You should not bring food with you, as there are import restrictions on meat products and other foodstuffs. The import of pets is also strictly controlled.

You are entitled to certain duty- and tax-free allowances. Check at the airport's duty-free shop before departure. Tourists under 17 are not entitled to tobacco or drinks allowances in the North, under 18 in the Republic.

◆ Currency

The Republic of Ireland was one of the EU Member States that adopted the euro in 1999. The United Kingdom did not, so Northern Ireland, which is part of the UK, uses the British pound Sterling as its currency unit. Don't forget to change your money if crossing the border.

Getting Around

◆ By Car

The advantage of using a car is that you can wander away from the main roads and discover the real Ireland, and stop and go where you wish. I can't recommend this strongly enough.

CAR RENTAL COMPANIES	
Most of the following have desks at the main airports.	
IN NORTHERN IRELAND	
Avis	www.avisworld.com, ☎ (028) 9045-2017
Hertz	www.hertz.co.uk or www.hertz.com, ☎ (028) 9073-2451
National	www.nationalcar.co.uk, ☎ (028) 9442 2285
Europcar	www.europcar.com, ☎ (028) 9045-0904
Budget	www.budget.com, ☎ (028) 9045-1111
IN THE REPUBLIC	
Avis	☎ 1890-405-060
Murrays	www.europcar.ie, Dublin Airport, ☎ (01) 812-0410, Shannon Airport, ☎ (061) 701-200, Cork Airport, ☎ (021) 491-7300
Enterprise	☎ (021) 497-5133
National	☎ (021) 432-0755
Sixt Irish	www.irishcarrentals.com, ☎ 1850-206-088

Relax & Enjoy It

Many of our roads are narrow and winding, and you are likely to meet agricultural equipment on them during the summer months – it's part of the charm of Ireland, so don't get impatient. Just relax.

In many parts of the country you only have to turn off a main route to be immediately in another world, with roads winding between hedges and the only sound birdsong. Allow yourself plenty of time to explore, rather than dashing between destinations.

Unfortunately, renting cars is more expensive in the Republic than in most other destinations in Europe, so check for rates and special deals. Most cars have manual gearshift, so ask in advance if you want an automatic. Some airlines offer reduced car rental rates if you book at the time you make your flight reservations.

Be sure that your rental insurance covers you if planning to cross the border.

Maps

An excellent map, covering the whole island, is Michelin No 405, scale 1:400,000 or 1 inch to 6.3 miles.

If you want to concentrate on part of Ireland, there are very useful maps called *Ireland West, East, North* and *South* – their scale is 1: 250,000, about 1 inch to 4 miles.

There are detailed Ordnance Survey maps available for all areas, which you can buy in main bookstores and tourist information offices. If you are coming here to hillwalk or climb, you would be advised to invest in detailed maps.

In the Republic national routes are marked on maps and on the roads with the letter N, and minor roads have the prefix R and a number.

In Northern Ireland the main routes are marked with A and the minor with a B.

Road Rules

We drive on the left and pass on the right. Traffic on a roundabout (rotary) has priority. Until you become accustomed to it, be especially careful when joining or leaving roundabouts, and when setting off again after a break from driving.

In Northern Ireland, speed limits are measured in miles per hour (mph); in towns and cities it is 30 mph; on other roads it is 60mph, and 70mph on motorways.

Seat belts are compulsory for all drivers and passengers and motorcyclists must wear helmets.

TOLL ROADS

There are tolls on the following roads:

The East Link Bridge, the West Link Bridge, the West Link Bridge 2 (all in Dublin); and on the M1 (Drogheda By-Pass). Have coins ready – the toll is about 2 euro each time.

ROAD SIGNS

Signs on minor roads are often noticeable by their absence in the Republic and, even where you see them, frequently do not give distances, which can be irritating. If you stop to ask distances, the Irish

may give them as shorter than they are, as though they want to please you.

Traditionally, the Irish mile was 480 yards longer than the English mile. On old stone milestones both in the North and the Republic you'll still see distances measured in Irish miles.

Note that the most important warning signs, such as yield to traffic on a major road ahead and speed limits, have red edges.

Other warning signs of some danger or hazard, such as roundabout ahead or road narrows ahead, have a yellow background with markings in black.

Information signs, such as *Bray 2 km*, are white with the road number, such as N17, in yellow letters on a green panel within a larger sign.

Signs for tourist attractions have cream letters on a brown background and use pictorial symbols for the attraction.

PARKING

The "disc parking" system is in operation in cities, including Galway, Limerick and Cork. Buy discs in garages on approach roads or in shops and follow the simple directions to indicate when you parked and the time allotted. In some areas of Dublin there are parking meters that take coins.

Shopping centers often have parking. You usually have to pay at a machine before returning to your car.

Clamping of cars has been introduced in Irish cities, so don't risk it by parking illegally. Ask locals for help – they will know where you can park and where to buy discs if necessary.

◆ By Rail

Rail runabout tickets (seven days unlimited travel) are available from main Northern Ireland Railway (NIR) stations. Irish Rail-Iarnród Éireann has great value **Explorer Rail** tickets (Republic only) valid on Intercity, DART and Suburban rail. There's also the **Irish Explorer Rail & Bus** ticket, also for use in the Republic only. For travel all over the island there's the **Irish Rover Rail**, and the **Emerald Card** for rail and bus. These can be picked up at major train stations throughout Ireland.

THE REPUBLIC

Irish Rail or *Iarnród Éireann*, ("iron road of Ireland" in Irish; www.irishrail.ie) runs the railway service.

There are two main rail stations in Dublin: **Connolly** serving the north and northwest, and **Heuston** serving the south and west. The main routes from Heuston are to Cork, Limerick, Tralee, Galway, Westport, Ballina, Waterford. From Connolly they are to Sligo, Belfast (Enterprise Service jointly run with Northern Ireland Railways), Wexford, Rosslare Europort.

- ***Irish Rail Enquiries and Sales**, 35 Lower Abbey Street, Dublin, ☎ (01) 703-1888*
- ***Irish Rail Travel Center**, Kent Station, Cork, ☎ (021) 450-4888 or 1850-366-222*
- ***Heuston Station**, Dublin, ☎ (01) 703-3299, 703-2131*
- ***Connolly Station**, Dublin, ☎ (01) 703-2358*
- ***Limerick Station**, ☎ 1850-366-222*
- ***Galway Station**, ☎ (091) 562-730*
- ***Waterford Station**, ☎ (051) 873-401, 317-899*
- ***Sligo Station**, ☎ (071) 69888*

Schedules can be obtained by phoning Éareann Information line at ☎ 1850-366-222 or from the following talking timetable numbers:

ROUTE	PHONE NUMBER
Dublin/Cork	☎ 01 8054200 or 021 4504544
Dublin/Limerick	☎ 01 8054211 or 061 413355
Dublin/Galway	☎ 01 8054222
Dublin/Waterford	☎ 01 8054233
Dublin/Westport	☎ 01 8054244
Dublin/Sligo	☎ 01 8054255
Dublin/Tralee	☎ 01 8054266
Dublin/Belfast	☎ 01 8054277
Dublin/Rosslare	☎ 01 8054288
Dublin/Ballina	☎ 01 8054299

Other intercity routes are Cork to Tralee, Cork to Limerick, and Limerick to Rosslare Europort. A suburban service also operates between Cork and Cobh. Check for special fares and discounted day returns (round-trips).

You do not need a passport to travel between Northern Ireland and the Republic, as there are no border controls.

NORTHERN IRELAND

The rail service operator is **Northern Ireland Railways**. For both rail and bus inquiries, contact **Translink** at ☎ (028) 9066-6630, www.translink.co.uk.

There are four main rail routes from Belfast Central Station: north to Derry City via Ballymena and Coleraine; northeast to the port of Larne; east to Bangor along the shores of Belfast Lough or Lake; and south to Dublin via Newry.

The **Belfast-Dublin Enterprise Express** takes just over two hours, with eight trains daily in both directions (five on Sundays); ☎ (028) 9089-9411. Check for discounted day returns and free bus service into the cuty center from Belfast Central.

◆ By Bus

Busárus is the main bus station in Dublin. It's close to Connolly rail station. The Stationlink bus connects Heuston Station, *Busárus*, and Connolly Station, stopping near O'Connell Street en route.

Belfast has two bus stations – one on **Laganside**, the other behind the **Europa Hotel** – don't get confused.

The island has a good network connecting cities and towns, including many places not served by rail. Express coaches run between cities and larger towns. They are a great way of seeing the country, and they're cheaper than rail travel.

***Rambler** tickets are available for unlimited travel by bus within the Republic for three, eight and 15 days. **Irish Rover** tickets allow unlimited travel throughout the island for the same periods.*

For all inquiries about bus or rail travel in Northern Ireland, call **Translink**, ☎ (028) 9066-6630, www.translink.com. For bus information, e-mail info@buseireann.ie, visit their Web site at www.buseireann.ie. In Dublin, the Central Bus Station (*Busárus*) can be reached at ☎ (01) 836-6111; local phone numbers are given in each chapter.

Media & Communication

◆ Using the Telephone

The international code for the Republic is ☎ 353 and for Northern Ireland ☎ 44. The international code if calling the USA or Canada from Ireland is ☎ 1.

Buy a prepaid callcard, sold in shops all over the country, to make phone calls, or look for a phone that takes your credit card. You will most likely be charged a ridiculous amount to phone from your hotel room.

Within the Republic, use the complete number listed, including prefix, if phoning outside your immediate area. For example, ☎ 01-679-1977 for the Northern Ireland Tourist Office in Dublin. If you are in Dublin, drop the 01 prefix. From Northern Ireland, that same number becomes ☎ 00353 1-679-1977, as if you were calling from overseas.

Within Northern Ireland use numbers as listed with prefix 028. If you are calling the North from the Republic, the prefix changes to 048.

From the rest of the world, use the international access code followed by country code, omitting the initial zero. So ☎ (028) 9066-6630, the Translink (rail and bus) enquiry number within Northern Ireland, becomes ☎ 0044-28-9066-6630.

◆ Newspapers & Magazines

In the Republic there are three daily newspapers – *The Irish Times, The Irish Independent*, both published in Dublin, and *The Irish Examiner,* which is published in Cork. In addition, there are two evening tabloids, *The Evening Herald* and *The Evening Echo* – the latter published by *The Examiner*.

In Northern Ireland the main daily papers are *The Irish News, The Belfast Telegraph*, *The Newsletter*, *The Derry Journal* and *Daily Ireland*.

On Sundays you can buy *The Sunday Independent*, *Ireland on Sunday*, *Sunday Tribune* and *Sunday Business Post*, and in the North, *Sunday Life*.

All the British daily and Sunday papers are available in Ireland, with parts of them produced specifically for the Irish market. In cities, you can buy American and other papers from overseas.

All over the country there are also weekly papers produced locally which give visitors a great insight into life in the area and are useful for checking on entertainment that's available.

Arts online: The all-Ireland arts and entertainment Web sites are www.art.ie and www.art.co.ni.

◆ TV & Radio

Multi-channel television is available almost everywhere, which means you can watch British as well as Irish channels, plus CNN, Sky and some European channels.

The national broadcaster in the Republic is **RTÉ** – *Radio Telefis Éireann* – which has three TV channels – RTÉ One and Network Two, and the Irish language TG4. There's also an independent channel, TV3. The national radio stations run by RTÉ are Radio One, 2FM, Lyric FM, and the Irish language *Radio na Gaeltachta*. There are also many independent and local radio stations all over the island.

In Northern Ireland, the **BBC** and **Ulster Television** are the main channels, and BBC has radio stations in Belfast and Derry.

Food & Drink

Irish cuisine has improved dramatically in recent decades, encouraged by leading hoteliers, including the Allen family of Ballymaloe House Hotel, Co. Cork, who were among the first to show us that, using fresh and locally produced ingredients, our cuisine couldn't be bettered anywhere.

BORD BIA

Bord Bia is the Irish Food board. It runs the *Féile Bia* program (a celebration of quality food) with the Restaurants Association of Ireland, the Irish Hotels Federation, and the support of the farming community. Participants show a commitment to use high quality and local produce. See www.bordbia.ie for a list. Pick up a copy of **A Taste of Ulster**, a free brochure listing hotels, restaurants, pubs, guesthouses and coffee shops that make the best use of local produce, published by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

◆ Typical Fare

A full Irish breakfast consists of cereal, sometimes porridge, followed by sausages, rashers of bacon, with white or black pudding, and fried egg (you may be offered a choice of poached or scrambled). Pudding is made from animal blood – which may sound revolting, but isn't. In Northern Ireland, breakfast usually includes a wonderful choice of breads, including soda farls (miniature white soda breads) and scones.

Continental breakfast has become very popular with the health-conscious – in Ireland it usually includes soda or wholemeal bread.

If you want to sample a typically Irish meal at lunchtime or in the evening, have bacon and cabbage, or Irish stew, made with mutton and vegetables. Potatoes boiled in their jackets used to be served with most meals, but sadly they are usually replaced with chips (French fries). Ask if potatoes are available – they are far more nutritious and delicious with a dab of butter.

French fries are called chips in Ireland; what North Americans call chips are called crisps here.

Smoked salmon served on soda bread makes a substantial snack, which is also very Irish, at any time of the day.

European and international cuisine has become very popular and menus often include dishes such as pasta, pizza and tacos. Vegetarians are better looked after than they used to be, when their only option was an omelet, and are now offered a range of dishes.

In recent decades a number of small **cheese producers** have appeared and there is a huge selection of what are often called "farm cheeses." Do try them. They are absolutely delicious and so much better than the over-processed variety.

◆ Drink

All over the world everyone has heard of **Guinness**, but other Irish stouts are produced in Cork called **Murphys** and **Beamish**. Most pubs have one or more of them on draught (draft), which is considered much better than in bottles. Stout is good for you, in moderation.

In pubs and hotel bars you'll find a huge variety of beers and lagers – some "on tap," which is the same as "on draught."

Wine is all imported and, in the Republic, expensive because of Government taxes. If you want only a glass, ask for a miniature bottle (which should cost the same), as otherwise you may be served from a bottle that has been open for some time. Also, unless you are a connoisseur, if ordering a bottle ask for the "house wine" from a menu, as they are usually perfectly acceptable and much cheaper.

You don't have to drink alcohol to enjoy a visit to a bar or pub. There are plenty of other drinks available, including tea and coffee. Never drink when driving.

A recent development found around the country are microbreweries producing their own beers, often using pure ingredients and old recipes. You'll find them in Carlow, Cork, Inagh in Co. Clare, Dublin and elsewhere.

◆ Where to Eat

In villages and towns there are small cafés and coffee shops where snacks and meals are available during the main trading hours of 9 am to 5:30 or 6 pm. Many pubs serve food, sandwiches, soup, and full meals, often only at lunchtime.

You can dine in the evenings in almost all hotels, even if you're not a guest there. Note that you may need to book in advance, particularly during the main tourist season.

At lunchtime, many hotels and pubs have a carvery, serving a substantial meal at reasonable cost. The choice usually includes roast meat, served with vegetables, a fish dish and a vegetarian option. Soup and dessert may be available too, but be wary of the soup, which is often made from a packet.

Even if the weather isn't great, you can enjoy a picnic, especially if you've got a car. If you can, buy the food in a supermarket. Most hotel rooms have a tea and coffee tray, so you can have a hot drink. Unless money is no problem, avoid hotel mini-bars; all items in them are exorbitantly priced.

You can find plenty of fast food outlets throughout the country, including McDonalds, Burger King and Supermacs, an Irish company. There are also lots of places selling takeout food, where you can buy deep-fried fish, chicken, sausages and chips, sandwiches, or pizza.

◆ Pubs

The pub (public house) is at the center of every village, town and city. In the cities there's a recent development – maxi-pubs, which are very big and noisy and attractive mainly to the young. Many pubs have televisions (sometimes more than one set) blaring these days, which is a shame. They also screen important soccer and rugby matches on huge screens – so avoid them at that time, unless that's what you enjoy.

Generally, if you want to experience the real Irish pub, look for smaller, traditional premises even in cities. There are thousands of them all over the island. Especially in rural towns and villages, they have a regular clientele, who usually enjoy chatting to visitors and will answer your questions about local sights and history. Many of them also have regular music sessions.

◆ Tipping & Service Charges

Check your restaurant bill and, if service is not included (it usually is) and you are satisfied with your experience, give a tip of 10-15%. You should also tip taxi drivers and hotel porters if happy with their service. In larger pubs, where you receive table service, you are expected to give a small tip, but not if you order at the counter.

◆ Smoking

In 2004 the government of the Republic banned smoking in public places, including pubs, restaurants, night clubs, guest houses and all areas of hotels except bedrooms. Some pubs and restaurants cater to smokers with heated outdoor smoking areas, and it is up to each hotel whether or not they have bedrooms set aside for smokers. Similar legislation is planned for Northern Ireland.

◆ Restrooms

You will find automated public restrooms in some town car parks.

Shopping centers have public restrooms, which you usually have to pay to use. Alternatively, stop into one of the larger department stores, or have a drink in a pub or coffee bar and use their facilities.

Shopping

Ireland is becoming multicultural, and even small towns have a huge variety of food shops catering to different cultures. As well as chainstores and shopping centers, there are many smaller shops, which often make the experience more enjoyable since they give you more of an opportunity to talk with the locals.

Although they are vanishing these days, in towns and villages you still find shops selling everything from milk to sweeping brushes, sometimes with half the premises occupied by a pub. Also there are some businesses that are a combination of a real estate service, a funeral service, and an off-licence (which sells alcohol for consumption off the premises and is therefore not a pub) – looking after their clients almost from cradle to grave!

If you are picnicking or staying in an apartment, go to a country market to buy vegetables, cheeses, and eggs straight from the farm. Markets usually have stalls selling delicious homemade cakes, breads, jams, chutneys, and so on.

There are craft shops all over the country, and you can visit many artists and craftspeople where they work and buy directly from them. It makes your purchase much more memorable and cuts out the mid-

dleman – plus you are supporting our talented people. Look for signs on the roads or ask locally.

◆ Reclaiming VAT

Value Added Tax (VAT) is charged at 17½% on most goods bought in the North and at 13½% in the Republic. It is included in the price of the item, and not always listed separately on your receipt. If you buy items or souvenirs, check whether the store operates the Retail Export Scheme (Northern Ireland) or the Tax Back Scheme (Republic), which allows you to reclaim VAT on goods for export. The shop assistant will need your passport to complete the Tax-Free Shopping form, which you present at Customs prior to departure.

LITTER

In the Republic, a tax on plastic carrier bags was introduced in 2002. It reduced the use of them by 1.2 billion bags per year. It costs only a few cents to use a plastic bag, but most Irish people now use more durable shopping bags instead. Fines have also been introduced for on-the-spot littering.

Public Holidays

◆ Bank Holidays

In both parts of Ireland the following are public holidays when banks and most shops are closed, public transport has a limited service, and some museums and heritage centers change opening times.

- January 1 – New Year's Day
- March 17 – St. Patrick's Day
- Easter Monday
- December 25 – Christmas Day
- December 26 – St. Stephen's Day or Boxing Day

In the Republic, the first Monday in June and August, and the last Monday in October are also public holidays. In Northern Ireland, the last Monday in May, July 12 (Orangeman's Day), and the last Monday in August are public holidays.

◆ Major Festivals

There are more than 350 annual festivals; contact the tourist boards (see details in each county chapter), or look at the Web site of **The Association of Irish Festival Events** (AOIFE): www.aoifeonline.com; ☎ (090) 9643779; aoifeonline@eircom.net.

Note that festivals are sometimes called *Fleadh* (from the Irish "festive occasion") or *Féile* ("welcome").

There are also special weekends or longer with lectures, seminars, lots of entertainment, usually organized in memory of a notable figure – for example WB Yeats in Sligo. Contact the tourist boards for further information.

Accommodations

All types of accommodation is available, from five-star hotels to hostels, castles to camping parks, apartments and houses for rent; you can spend all or part of your holiday cruising the waterways, or in a horse-drawn caravan, gently meandering along backroads. You can book almost all of them online.

◆ How to Book

Both tourist boards have a booking service on their Web sites. You can also book accommodations at any of the tourist information offices in Ireland.

- Republic: **www.ireland.travel.ie**
- The North: **www.discovernorthernireland.com**

Alternatively, contact the Gulliver Call Center from the US and Canada at ☎ 001-800-668-668-66; or reservations@gulliver.ie.

Another useful Web site is **www.irelandhotels.com**, run by the Irish Hotels Federation. You can book online, and also find special packages for those interested in angling or golf.

◆ Rates

In many hotels, rates are per person, and a supplement is charged when only one person occupies a room. If rates are per room, as is

often the case with large chains such as Jurys Inns and Travel Inns, this will be indicated in the rate quote. There are special reductions at some hotels for over-55s.

THE STAR SYSTEM

Hotels and guesthouses are classified by Bord Fáilte in the Republic and by the Northern Irish Tourist Board, working with the Irish Hotels Federation. They use a star system: **Five Stars** (☆☆☆☆☆) An international standard of comfort and service with luxurious and spacious guest accommodations, including suites; high-quality restaurants with table d'hôte and à la carte menus. **Four Stars** (☆☆☆☆) Large hotels with a high standard of comfort and service in well-appointed premises; all bedrooms ensuite; cuisine meets exacting standards; comprehensive room service. **Three Stars** (☆☆☆) Good facilities with a wide range of services; all bedrooms ensuite; food available all day. **Two Stars** (☆☆) Good facilities with reasonable accommodations and most bedrooms ensuite. **One Star** (☆) Hotels with acceptable standards of accommodations and food. Some bedrooms have ensuite facilities.

◆ Where to Stay

ACCOMMODATIONS

$	under $60
$$	$61-120
$$$	$121-182
$$$$	$183-243
$$$$$	over $244

Where you stay depends on your budget and personal taste. Many international and UK chains now have hotels here, including Radisson, Hilton, Holiday Inn, Ibis, Travelodge, and Posthouse. If you prefer something special and uniquely Irish, look at castles and private homes, such as Hidden Ireland (see page 53).

Hotel Chains

There are a number of chains and some groups of independently owned and operated hotels that get together for marketing purposes. Special low rates are often available online, and at times there are reduced rates for staying more than one night.

THE AUTHOR RECOMMENDS

Irish Country Hotels, family-owned and -run, with highest standards of attention, in idyllic settings. $$. ☎ (01) 295-8900; fax 295-8940; info@irishcountryhotels.com; www.irishcountryhotels.com. **Manor House Hotels** ☆☆☆ and ☆☆☆☆, luxury and boutique hotels, with country-house atmosphere, period features and furnishings. $$$. info@manorhousehotels.com; www.manorhousehotels.com. **Choice Hotels Ireland** (part of Choice Hotels International) has hotels all over Ireland, under three brands: **Clarion**, usually in city centers, are ☆☆☆☆ and have excellent facilities; $$$-$$$$.

Quality Inns, some with leisure centers, are mostly ☆☆☆ in tourist areas; $$-$$$. **Comfort Inns and Hotels** are for the budget traveler and have comfortable accommodations with minimal facilities; $$-$$$. Single and room-only rates and special deals are offerred. From overseas ☎ 1-800-500-600; in the Republic ☎ 1850-605-705; from the North ☎ 353-21-490-8282; fax 427-1489; info@choicehotelsireland.ie; www.choicehotelsireland.ie.

Jurys Hotels have a number of properties in Dublin and other cities. They are members of The Leading Hotels of the World. $$$$, with lower rates available online. Jurys Inns in main cities are for the budget market; rooms sleep at least two; from $. www.jurysdoyle.com.

Best Western are independently owned all over Ireland. International ☎ 1-800-WESTERN; mail@bestwestern.com; www.bestwestern.com.

Brian McEniff includes hotels in counties Sligo, Mayo and Donegal, and in Dublin. Callsave in the Republic ☎ 1850-30-40-50; Freephone from North ☎ 0800-282-007; centralreservations@brianmceniffhotels.com; www.brianmceniffhotels.com.

Tower Hotel Group includes the only hotel within the medieval city walls of Derry. Others in Killarney, Co. Kerry, and Faithlegg, near Waterford City, have golf courses. ☎ (01) 428-2400, fax 428-2411, or Callsave in Republic ☎ 1850-252-252; fax 873-0194; reservations@thg.ie; www.towerhotelgroup.com.

STAY SOMEWHERE SPECIAL

Hidden Ireland is a network of private houses offering visitors the chance to experience country life. All buildings are of historic interest, some on their own estates. Part of the enjoyment of staying in any of them is that none is large, so you have the chance to meet your fellow guests, sometimes dining with them and your hosts. Prices start at $$. ☎ (01) 662-7166; fax 662-7144; info@hidden-ireland.com; www.hidden-ireland.com. Some of its member properties are also available for rent. **Ireland's Blue Book** is an association of country manor houses, castles and restaurants, all offering wonderfully high standards of personal attention with traditional hospitality, accommodation and fine cuisine in beautiful surroundings. Among them are **Moy House** near Lahinch, Co. Clare, (one of my favorite buildings in the entire country) and the multi-award-winning five-star **Park Hotel**, Kenmare, Co. Kerry. ☎ (01) 676-9914; fax 631-4990; enquiry@irelandsbluebook.com; www.irelands-blue-book.ie. Note that properties belonging to these groups are usually not classified under the hotel star system.

Budget Options

Some hotel chains, including Jurys Inns and Travelodge, offer the budget option of paying per room, rather than per person, with breakfast and other meals available either on the premises or close by. Most have a choice of rooms – doubles, twins or family rooms (which sleep four). They can be excellent value if at least two are traveling together.

Non-chain Hotels

Hotels that are not part of a chain, a marketing group or an association are often included in www.irelandhotels.com, appear on tourist board lists and are in *Be Our Guest: Hotels & Guesthouses Guide*, published by the Irish Hotels Federation. They vary in quality and facilities offered.

GOING SOLO

The Irish are welcoming to visitors traveling alone and Ireland is safe for women. I often travel alone, but am careful about returning to my accommodation unaccompanied late at night when staying in a city or large town. The only disadvantage of going solo is having to pay a single-person supplement in many hotels.

Bed & Breakfasts

If you like a home-away-from-home experience, choose a family-run guesthouse or B&B. You meet Irish people, who can advise you about the locality, and generally two can stay overnight for half the cost of a hotel.

If the B&B or guesthouse displays a shamrock symbol it means it's been approved by the tourist board. However, those without a shamrock are not dreadful. It costs money to be registered and some owners decide not to bother. There are advantages to choosing an approved establishment, as many accept prepaid vouchers and take credit cards, and if you do have a serious complaint afterwards you can take it up with Bord Fáilte/Northern Ireland Tourist Board. Both tourist boards produce guides to bed and breakfasts, and there are others, including the following.

THE TOWN & COUNTRY HOMES ASSOCIATION

The Association has over 1,700 members, all over the island, and publishes an annual guide. About 70% of the homes can be booked by e-mail. Their head office is Belleek Road, Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal, ☎ (071) 9822-222; fax 22-207; admin@townandcountry.ie; www.townandcountry.ie.

Irish Farmhouse Holidays

Stay in an Irish Farmhouse Bed & Breakfast – choose from 300+ members, with accommodations ranging from traditional homesteads to modern working farms. All Bed & Breakfasts are also Fáilte Ireland approved; several also provide self-catering facilities. Contact Irish Farmhouse Holidays, ☎ 061-400700, fax 400771, www.irishfarmholidays.com, info@irishfarmholidays.com.

Vegetarians

If you're a vegetarian, hotels and guesthouses will do their best to cater to you. Some specialize in this market, among them the following:

Cussens Cottage, Ballygrennan, Bulgaden, Kilmallock, Co. Limerick, a guesthouse serving vegetarian, vegan and macrobiotic food, uses their own organic vegetables and has pure water from a well on-site. ☎ (063) 98926; www.cussenscottage.com, info@cussenscottage.com.

At **Shiplake Mountain Hostel**, near Dunmanway, West Cork, accommodations range from a traditional farmhouse to gypsy caravans. Organic vegetarian meals are served. ☎ (023) 45750; www.shiplakemountainhostel.com, info@shiplakemountainhostel.com.

Temple Country House and Spa, Horseleap, Moate, Co. Westmeath, a 250-year-old house on 100 acres, offers contemporary pampering. It caters to vegetarian, vegan and special diets. ☎ (0506) 35118; fax 35008; info@templespa.ie; www.templespa.ie.

The award-winning **Pheasant's Hill Bed and Breakfast**, Downpatrick, Co. Down, serves vegetarian breakfasts on request and sells free-range and organic foods in its farm shop. ☎ (028) 4461 7246; info@pheasantshill.com; www.pheasantshill.com.

Hostels

The **IHHI (Independent Holiday Hostels of Ireland)** is a cooperative of hostels all over the island, each unique. All are approved by the tourist boards, offering reasonably priced accommodation. Most are open. Overnight charges start at around €12 per person for dormitories, and average €16 for a limited number of private rooms. Facilities vary; some include breakfast, in others you cook for yourself. Staying in a hostel is a great way of meeting others, including Irish people. Many of these properties host music sessions or other events, or you can hire bikes, go horseback riding or canoeing locally. ☎ (01) 836-4700; fax 836-4710; info@hostels-ireland.com; www.hostels-ireland.com.

Non-members can stay in hostels run by *An Óige*, the branch of the **International Youth Hostel Association** in the Republic. Despite its name, you don't have to be young to join; memberships are available for different ages groups as well as families. You need an International Guest Card; you can then buy six Welcome Stamps from any

one of the hostels and attach them to a Guest Card, and this makes you a full member of Hostelling International. Check the membership options on the Web site. ☎ (01) 830-4555; fax 830-5808; mailbox@anoige.ie; www.irelandyha.org.

Rental Properties

There is a huge selection of flats and houses with kitchens and many are available for breaks shorter than a week.

Among the more unusual are the chalets in **Killykeen Forest Park** in Co. Cavan, run by ***Coillte***, the Forestry Service. Open all year, chalets are available for two nights or more. ☎ (048) 433-2541; killykeen@coillte.ie; www.coillte.ie. If this type of vacation appeals to you, contact the following organizations:

Self Catering Ireland has a range of properties on its books, ranging from penthouses to traditional thatched cottages. ☎ (053) 33999, fax 33808. Callsave in Ireland, ☎ 1850-200-236; info@selfcatering-ireland.com; www.selfcatering-ireland.com.

Irish Cottage Holiday Homes has clusters of eight-20 cottages in 30 locations. ☎ (01) 205-2777; fax 293-3025; www.irishcottageholidays.com; cottage@irishcottageholidays.com.

Home from Home Holidays has three- and four-star properties all near beaches, golf courses or other outdoor facilities. ☎ (023) 33110; fax 33873; info@homefromhomeholidays.com; www.homefromhome.ie.

- For **rural cottages**: www.cottagesinireland.com
- For **Northern Ireland**: www.cottagesinireland.com
- **Rural Cottage Holidays, Ltd.**, ☎ (028) 9044 1535, fax 9044 1530; rural.cottages@nitb.com

SOMETHING SPECIAL

The **Irish Landmark Trust** is a charity that rescues buildings of character and architectural merit from neglect. Once restored, they are available for rent. They're all over the country and range from quirky water towers to garden follies, lighthouses to castles. The smallest of them sleep two. ☎ (01) 670-4733, fax 670-4887; www.irishlandmark.com, info@irishlandmark.com.

Camping & RV Parks

There are campsites all over Ireland with sites available for touring caravans, motorhomes and tents, many in scenic areas.

The most useful Web site is www.camping-ireland.ie, which lists over 100 sites, some in the North. It has an online booking facility. Sites are inspected and graded by the tourist boards.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board publishes a free ***Guide to Caravanning and Camping***. Sites included in the publication have been inspected and given a rating under the UK Star Quality Scheme.

RENTING AN RV OR TENT

Charges differ, depending on facilities and time of year. One- to two-person tents are charged from €9-15 per tent per night (£6-10); motorhomes or caravans, from €14-30.

GENERAL SUPPLIES

- **O'Meara Camping**, Unit 5, Sunshine Industrial Estate, Crumlin Road Dublin 12. ☎ (01) 435-4070, www.omearacamping.com, info@omearacamping.com.
- **Carra Caravans Ltd**, Castlebar, Co. Mayo. ☎ (094) 903-2054; fax 903-2351.
- **Inny Camping**, Ballymahon, Co. Longford. ☎ (090) 643-2123; www.innycamping.com, sales@innycamping.com.

Motorhomes

- **Motorhome Depot Ltd.**, Ratoath Road, Kilbride, near Mulhuddart, Co. Meath. ☎ (01) 822-0563, fax 869-8001; www.motorhome.ie, depot@motorhome.ie.
- **Motorhome Ireland Ltd.**, 17 Valley Road, Banbridge, Co. Down, Northern Ireland. ☎ (028) 4062 1800; fax 4062 1801; www.motorhome.ie, rental@motorhome.ie.

Horse-drawn Caravans

For a relaxing time, take a holiday in a horse-drawn caravan. You don't have to know about handling a horse, as you're given instructions. You will see a small area, and get to know it intimately as you move at walking pace. Take a look at www.irishhorsedrawncaravans.

com with details of members of the **Irish Horse Drawn Caravan Federation**.

Cruising

You don't have to know anything about boats to enjoy a cruising vacation. Full instruction is given before you head off. The Web site of the **Inland Waterways Association of Ireland** has detailed information about the waterways, and lists companies offering boats for hire. In the Republic, Lo-call ☎ 1890 924991; in the North, ☎ (028) 3832 5329; www.iwia.ie/rentals. In addition to the following operators, there are listings in the relevant chapters.

Carrickcraft, Kinnego Marina, Oxford Island, Lurgan, Co. Armagh, Northern Ireland, has two marinas on the Shannon and one on the Erne. A two-berth boat in July costs about €700 per week, €400 for a weekend. ☎ (028) 3834-4993; fax 3834-4904; sales@carrickcraft.com; www.cruise-ireland.com.

Prices are about the same on **Silver Line Cruisers**, based at The Marina, Banagher, Co. Offaly, between the lakes called Lough Ree and Lough Derg. ☎ (0509) 51112; fax 51632; silverline@eircom.net; www.silverlinecruisers.com.

Adventures

◆ On Wheels

Cycling routes are mentioned throughout this text, and some driving routes may be suitable for bikes.

The **Sustrans National Cycle Network** in the North (www.sustrans.org.uk; its name comes from "sustainable transport") is a UK charity. Its flagship project is the National Cycle Network, with routes traversing the North.

Useful Contacts

- **National Cycle Network** – www.nationalcyclenetwork.org.uk
- In the Republic, a number of annual events are organized by **Cycling Ireland**, ☎ (01) 855-1522, fax 855-1771.

◆ On Horseback

The Irish love horses. They are renowned for breeding and for some of the best jockeys in the world. Some of the many equestrian centers and other facilities are listed under each location in this guide.

You can visit the **Irish National Stud** in Kildare Town. Open daily, February-November, 9:30 am-6 pm. ☎ (045) 521617; fax 522964; stud@irish-national-stud.ie; www.irish-national-stud.ie.

◆ On Foot

Waymarked Ways

Waymarked trails have been developed all over Ireland over the last 20 years, and are designed so that a reasonably fit person can follow them. There's a free booklet that gives details of all the ways, and includes lists of recommended maps and guides, how to access the ways and provides route contacts. Consult the Web site at www.irishwaymarkedways.ie.

While you can follow them just using the waymarks (the symbol of a walking man), you should take a map or map-guide with you so you don't miss the archaeological and historical sites along the way.

If climbing or hill walking, never head off alone and always leave details of your route and your estimated time of return with someone. Every year mountain rescue teams are called out, often to come to assist overseas visitors. These brave people risk their lives to save others – and do so on a voluntary basis.

Walking vacations

There are lots of town trails, and walks along towpaths beside canals and rivers, or in forests. If you want to have a walking vacation without having to organize it yourself, there are a number of operators.

Go Ireland organizes a choice of walks in different areas, including Antrim and Fermanagh. ☎ (066) 976-2094, US toll free 1-800-721-4672; www.goactivities.com; goireland@goactivities.com.

South-West Walks Ireland has guided and self-guided vacations in the North and the Republic. ☎ (066) 712-8733; www.southwestwalksireland.com, swwi@iol.ie.

Walking & Talking in Ireland offers eight-day vacations in Antrim and Donegal. During the walks you hear about the culture, history, geography and politics of both areas. ☎ /fax (074) 9159366; info@walktalkireland.com; www.walktalkireland.com.

Another useful site is www.gateway-to-the-burren.com.

◆ On & In the Water

With such a wonderful coastline, and so many inland waterways and loughs, the country offers numerous watersports.

Angling

Ireland is a paradise for anyone interested in fishing. Its coastline, over 3,000 miles long (4,800 km), is washed by some of the cleanest seas in Europe and it has many inland waterways, plus some of the most lightly fished freshwaters.

The landscape, with small fields and wild bogs, is littered with loughs (lakes) of all sizes and drained by many rivers, and there are over 7,000 miles (11,300 km) of riverbank for the coarse angler.

Visiting anglers are welcome to fish by becoming a member of the local controlling club or by purchasing a day, week, or season permit. Permits, also called tickets, are available from fishing tackle shops and some hotels and guesthouses.

ANGLING OPTIONS

Game angling is defined as the pursuit of native fish in wild places. Salmon, trout and sea trout are native species. Grilse are salmon that have spent a winter at sea. Sea trout, despite their name, can be found in rivers and loughs. Brown trout are found in most river and lough systems and, although a single species, are of many different colors and sizes.

THE SEASON

The salmon and sea trout season opens on January 1st in some fisheries. Most fisheries open at various later dates up to March 20th. Most brown trout fisheries open between February 15th and March 1st. Most fisheries close on September 30th, with some exceptions

that close on various dates between September 15th and October 12th. Most brown trout fisheries close on September 30th, with some exceptions closing on dates between September 15th and October 12th. A State licence is required for salmon and sea trout angling. Buy one from the local Fisheries Board, or from tackle and sports shops in the area.

Coarse angling refers to fishing for bream, tench, roach, rudd, perch, eels, dace, carp, and hybrids; and, because wherever in Ireland you find good shoals of coarse fish, you will find some pike as well, they are included.

There is no closed season for coarse fishing in Ireland, and fish that feed throughout the year, such as pike, roach and perch, can be fished for in every month. Species such as tench, bream and rudd, which are most active in the warmer months, have a natural season extending from April to about October. Information on the best times to fish is available on the Web site of the **Central Fisheries Board** at www.cfb.ie.

FISHERIES BOARDS IN THE REPUBLIC

- *The **Western Fisheries Region**, ☎ (091) 563118; fax 566335; info@wrfb.ie; www.wrfb.ie.*
- ***Shannon Regional Fisheries Board**, ☎ (061) 300238; fax 300308; info@shannon-fishery-board.ie; www.shannon-fishery-board-ie.*
- *The **South Western Regional Fisheries Board**, ☎ (026) 41221; fax 41223; swrfb@swrfb.ie; www.swrfb.ie.*
- *The **Southern Regional Fisheries Board**, ☎ (052) 23624; fax 23971; enquiries@srfb.ie; www.srfb.ie.*
- *The **Eastern Regional Fisheries Board**, ☎ (01) 278-7022; fax 278-7025; info@erfb.ie; www.fishingireland.net.*
- *The **North Western Fisheries Region**, ☎ (096) 22623; fax 70543; nwrfb@iol.ie; www.northwestfisheries.ie.*
- *The **Northern Regional Fisheries Board**, ☎ (071) 9851435; fax 51816; hllyoyd@nrfb.ie; www.nrfb.ie.*

FISHERIES BOARDS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

- *The **Fisheries Conservancy Board** is the public body looking after the salmon and inland fisheries of the North, except the fisher-*

ies of the Foyle, Carlingford and the Irish Lights Commission. ☎ (028) 3833-4666; www.fcbni.com.

- *The **Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure** is responsible for inland wild fish stocks, and the development of inland waters. ☎ (028) 9025-8861.*
- *The **Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission** is one of the six North/South Implementation Bodies established under the Good Friday Agreement. It's responsible for salmon and inland fisheries in the Foyle and Carlingford areas and is usually known as the Loughs Agency. ☎ (028) 7134-2100.*

Additional information is available from:

- ***Fishing in Northern Ireland** – www.discovernorthernireland.com/angling, info@nitb.com*
- ***Angling in Ireland** – www.angling-in-ireland.com*
- ***The Foyle System** – www.foylefishing.net*
- ***The Bann System** – www.bannsystem.infm.ulst.ac.uk*

Diving

Recreational diving is possible all year round in Northern Ireland, except in severe weather. Lessons are available and there are excellent support facilities.

DV Diving arranges packages for individuals and groups. Their qualified advanced instructors have extensive knowledge of local waters, especially the inland sea of Strangford Lough and the wreck-strewn Irish Sea coast of Co. Down. ☎ /fax (028) 9186-1686/9146 4671; info@dvdiving.co.uk; www.dvdiving.co.uk.

Norsemaid Sea Enterprises run diving cruise vacations, from Bangor Marina in Co. Down. Contact Alan or Iris Wright. ☎ (028) 9181-2081; www.salutay.com, salutay@btopenworld.com.

Sailing

You can learn to sail and take lessons in watersports at a number of centers. The following is a partial listing. Check tourist board Web sites for more.

The **Killary Adventure Company**, Leenane, Co. Galway, offers skiing, kayaking, Hobie-cat sailing and speed boat trips, plus land-based experiences. Choice of accommodations. ☎ (095) 43411; fax 42314; www.killary.com; adventure@killary.com.

International Sailing and Powerboating Centre, Cobh, Co. Cork, provides accommodation if required. ☎ (021) 481-1237; info@sailcork.com; www.sailcork.com.

South East Cruising School. Wicklow Town, ☎ (0404) 69970; sailsoutheast@eircom.net.

Glenans Irish Sailing Club, Collanmore Island, Co. Mayo and Baltimore, Co. Cork. Hostel-style accommodation available. ☎ (01) 661-1481; fax 676-4249; info@glenans-ireland.com; www.glenans-ireland.com.

Kilrush Creek Adventure Centre, Co. Clare. Kayaking, sailing and powerboat courses, as well as windsurfing, archery and land games. ☎ (065) 905-2855; fax 905-2895; www.kilrushcreekadventure.com, info@kilrushcreekadventure.com.

Swimming

Blue Flags are awarded to beaches and marinas that satisfy a number of criteria, including water quality, environmental education, information and management, safety and services. They are highly prized awards, given only for one season at a time by a non-governmental organization, the Foundation for Environmental Education operating in Europe, Africa and America. Check out www.blueflag.org.

SAFETY FIRST

Lifeguards are on duty during the summer season (June to the end of August), but only on the most frequented beaches, so do check locally about safety before swimming or taking part in other watersports. If taking to the water in a boat, wear a lifejacket at all times and make sure you know the weather forecast. Listen to local advice regarding conditions. Every year the volunteers of the **Royal National Lifeboat Service of Ireland** risk their lives to save others, many of them visitors from overseas.

◆ Golf

There are golf courses all over Ireland, from championship 18-hole courses to nine-hole facilities, and many are listed under their location. Many hotels have their own courses, or can arrange tee times for you nearby.

A number of specialist operators arrange inclusive golfing vacations. Among them are:

- **The Carr Golf Group**. ☎ US toll-free 800-882-2656, (01) 822-6662; fax 822-6668; info@carrgolf.com; www.carrgolf.com
- **Irish Golf Tours Ltd.**, ☎ (051) 381728; info@irish-golftours.com; www.irishgolftours.com
- **Online Golf Travel**. US toll-free ☎ 1-877-227-1481, fax 890-6668; info@onlinegolftravel.com; www.golfingireland.com
- **Swing** specializes in playing the most renowned courses in the southwest, and arranges tee times for you. ☎ (066) 712-5733; fax 7123-651; www.swinggolfireland.com, reservations@swinggolfireland.com.
- To play golf on the links courses in the *Gaeltacht* areas of Donegal, Mayo and Galway, contact **Gael Saoire**, ☎ (066)915-2423; fax 915-2429; info@gaelsaoire.ie.

Check out the tourism Web sites for the area of Ireland you plan to visit or one of the following organizat:ions

- www.golf.travel.ie.
- www.irishgolfexperience.com.

For general queries about amateur golf, contact the **Golfing Union of Ireland**. ☎ (01) 505-4000; fax 505-4001; www.gui.ie, information@gui.ie.

◆ Spectator Sports

The GAA

The **Gaelic Athletic Association**, usually called the GAA, was founded in 1884 and is more than a sporting organization. Dedicated to supporting hurling, football, camogie, handball and rounders, it also actively promotes Irish culture – including the language, traditional music and dance. You'll see GAA grounds in every town all over the Republic and quite a few in nationalist areas of the North.

Gaelic football is similar to both soccer and rugby, but it's older than either of them. It's played by teams of 15 and is very popular.

Hurling is a bit like hockey, played with a small ball (*sliothar* in Irish) and a curved stick or hurley (*camán*). It's mentioned in Irish folklore dating back 2,000 years, and is played by teams of 15. It's a fast and exciting game to watch. **Camogie** is similar, played by females.

Handball is played in pairs or doubles, by striking a ball against a forecourt wall. You'll see courts on the outskirts of towns or villages.

Croke Park, on the north side of Dublin, is where All-Ireland Finals and other important games are played and it houses the **GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association) Museum**. The museum is open year-round, hours as follows: September to June, Monday to Saturday, 9: 30 am to 5 pm; July & August to 6 pm; Sundays, noon to 5 pm; closed on match days. ☎ (01) 819-2323, fax 819-2324; www.gaa.ie, gaamuseum@crokepark.ie.

Horseracing

Point-to-point races are held on farms all over the country during the first six months of the year. They're very exciting and always attract large crowds, as do races at Irish courses.

Take a look at the Web site of **Horse Racing Ireland** (www.hri.ie), where you can learn a lot about horses, including how to bet. There are several racecourses you might want to visit.

- **Cork Racecourse** is at Mallow, 20 miles (32 km) north of the city. www.corkracecourse.ie
- **The Curragh** is in Co. Kildare and is the home of the Irish Derby. www.curragh.ie
- **Down Royal** is the leading racecourse in the North. www.downroyal.com
- **Fairyhouse** has hosted the Irish Grand National since 1870. www.fairyhouseracecourse.ie
- **Galway** has a Racing Festival in summer. www.galwayraces.com
- **Kilbeggan** is in the middle of the country. www.kilbegganraces.com
- **Leopardstown** is the course nearest to Dublin city. www.leopardstown.com

- **Limerick** is the country's newest course. www.limerick-racecourse.com
- **Naas** is in Co. Kildare, the county most associated with horse breeding. www.naasracecourse.com
- **Punchestown** is near Dublin. www.punchestown.com.
- **Tipperary** is another county where horses are bred. www.tipperaryraces.ie
- **Tramore** on the Waterford coast has held races for over 200 years. www.tramore-racecourse.com
- **Wexford** is another coastal course. www.wexfordraces.ie

Greyhound Racing

The popularity of greyhound racing in Ireland has soared in the last few years, mainly because the venues now offer fine dining as well as all the excitement of betting on the races Check www.igb.ie for locations and schedules.

SPORTING WEB SITES

Inland Waterways Association of Ireland, www.iwai.ie
Mountaineering Council of Ireland, www.mountaineering.ie
Irish Amateur Rowing Union (IARU), www.iaru.ie
Irish Sailing Association (ISA), www.sailing.ie
Irish Surfing Association, www.isasurf.ie
Irish Field Sports, www.irishfieldsports.ie
Irish Canoe Union, www.irishcanoeunion.com

Special Interest Trips

There are trips devoted to many particular activities. You'll find some of them on the tourist board Web sites. Or contact one of the following.

◆ Cooking

Courses are available at the wonderful **Ballymaloe Cookery School** in East Cork, run by TV chef and author of a number of cookery books, Darina Allen. ☎ (021) 464-6785; fax 464-6909; enquiries@ballymaloe-cookery-school.ie; www.cookingisfun.ie.

◆ Writing

Contact **The Irish Writers' Centre** about writing holidays. ☎ (01) 872-1302; www.writerscentre.ie, info@writerscentre.ie. Or you might enjoy the workshops and other events at **Listowel Writers' Week**, Co. Kerry, in late May/early June. ☎ (068) 21074; writersweek@eircom.net; www.writersweek.ie.

◆ Painting

Anyone interested in painting holidays should look at the tourist board Web sites, as there is so much choice.

◆ Fishing

There are many hotels and guesthouses offering fishing vacations; ☎ (095) 42222; www.irelandfishing.com or www.irelandflyfishing.com, gfh@irelandflyfishing.com.

◆ Tracing Your Ancestors

There is a very useful free booklet published jointly by Bord Fáilte and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. It's full of advice and contact details, and also tells you about clan gatherings. ☎ 1-850-230-330 in Ireland or 1-800-223-6470 in North America for information. You can do research yourself or pay professionals, and there are Genealogy Centres all over the island.

◆ Heritage Tours

In the Republic, the **State Heritage Service** runs many sites, including castles and historic houses. Its counterpart in the North is the **National Trust**, a UK charity, which looks after a variety of sites, including the Giant's Causeway, nature reserves, gardens, and stately homes.

World Heritage Sites

World Heritage Sites are those deemed by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) to be of "outstanding universal value to humanity, based on their merits as best examples of cultural or natural heritage." There are three on the island of Ireland: **Brú na Bóinne** – the Boyne Valley, which includes Newgrange and Knowth, **Skellig Michael**, off the coast of Co. Kerry, and the **Giant's Causeway**, Co. Antrim, in Northern Ireland.

Heritage Towns

A "Heritage Town" is a community whose unique character and architecture have been preserved. Some of these have a visitor center, while others offer signposted trails or guided tours. There's a map-leaflet listing them, available through www.heritagetowns.com.

SAVE SOME MONEY

If you're planning to visit more than two National Trust sites, it's well worth buying a Heritage Card in the Republic or becoming a member of the Trust. You can do so at ANY Trust site or **Heritage Card**, ☎ (01) 647-2461; heritagecard@ealga.ie; www.heritageireland.ie; **The National Trust**, ☎ (028) 9751-0721; fax 9751-1242; www.nationaltrust.org.uk.

Members of the **Royal Oak Foundation** in the US enjoy free admission to National Trust properties; ☎ 1-800-913-6565 or 212-480-2889; www.royal-oak.org, general@royal-oak.org. You can also save money with a **Heritage Island Explorer** card, available with the *Heritage Island Touring Guide* from tourist offices, or ☎ (01) 236-6890, fax 236-6895, www.heritageisland.com, info@heritageisland.com.

Embassies

American Embassy: 42 Elgin Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4. ☎ (01) 668-9946; fax 668-8056; www.usembassy.gov.

American Consulate General – Belfast: Danesfort House, 223 Stranmillis Road, Belfast, BT9 5GR. ☎ (028) 9038-6100; fax 9068-1301.

Canadian Embassy, 65 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2. ☎ (01) 417-4100; emergency number ☎ (01) 478-1476; fax 417-4101; www.canadaeuropa.gc.ca/ireland; cdnembsy@iol.ie.

Consulate of Canada – Belfast: Mrs Lynne Zeller, Honorary Consul, Unit 3, Ormeau Business Park, 8 Cromac Avenue, Belfast. ☎/fax (028) 9127-2060.

Tourist Boards

Tourist Board for the Republic – Fáilte Ireland, Baggot Street Bridge, Dublin 2. ☎ 01-620-4000 or 1890-525-525, fax 01-855-6821; www.ireland.ie.

Northern Ireland Tourist Board, 59 North Street, Belfast, BT1 1NB and 16 Nassau Street, Dublin 2. ☎ 1850-230-230 and 353 (01) 1-679-1977 (Dublin office dialed from the North); info@nitb.com; www.discovernorthernireland.com.

Tourism Ireland markets both the Republic and the North overseas.

- **In US**: 345 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10154, ☎ 212-418-0800; fax 212-371-9052; www.tourismireland.com/us/
- **In Canada**: 2 Bloor Street West, Suite 3403, Toronto, Canada M4W 3E2. ☎ 1-416-925-6368, fax 416-925-6033; www.tourismireland/com

Currency

◆ The Euro

The currency of the Republic is the **euro** (€), so if you arrive from one of the other EU States (apart from the UK) you can use their currency.

There are 100 cents to €1; coins are in denominations of 1, 2, 5, 10, 20 and 50 cents, as well as €1 and 2. Notes are in denominations of €5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200 and 500.

◆ Pounds Sterling

In Northern Ireland the currency is the **pound Sterling** (£); there are 100 pennies to £1, and coins come in denominations of 1p, 2p, 5p, 10p, 20p, 50p, £1 and £2. Notes are in denominations of £5, £10, £20, £50 and £100.

The currencies of the Republic and Northern Ireland are not interchangeable, although many shops in larger cities in the North accept euros.

◆ Banks, ATMs & Currency Exchange

All banks have Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs). Any bank will exchange your money, as will most building societies and post offices.

Generally, banks are open Monday-Wednesday, 10 am-4 pm, Thursday and Friday, 10 am-5 pm. None is open on Saturday or Sunday.

◆ Travelers' Checks

For safety reasons, travelers' checks are a good idea. Remember that you must present your passport when cashing them. Also, if planning to visit both parts of Ireland you will need them in both currencies (Sterling and euros).

◆ Credit Cards

Most businesses accept American Express (Amex), MasterCard (MC) and Visa (V). A few accept Diners Club (DC). If your credit card is lost or stolen, report its loss in any bank immediately. You should also call the

800 number provided by your credit card company. Remember to report it to the police too, for insurance purposes.

Staying Safe

Ireland is not a dangerous country, and its people are generally friendly and helpful. Northern Ireland has the second-lowest crime rate in Europe. Even during the years of civil unrest, tourists were rarely directly affected. However, it is foolish to go into areas where there are tensions, especially around July 12, so take advice locally.

Sadly, these days it is not a good idea to wander around on foot late at night, as there has been an increase in unprovoked violent attacks. Ask locals if you aren't sure, or arrange to be picked up by taxi after an event.

Don't carry a lot of cash and, if challenged, hand it over, rather than risk injury. Be wary of pickpockets in crowded streets, or when withdrawing money from cash machines. Always carry your credit card separately so that if your wallet is snatched you are not left totally without money. If you have a room safe in your hotel, use it. You don't need to carry your passport with you as you explore.

◆ Illness & Injury

If you are taken ill, or are injured while in Ireland, you should call a local doctor, known as a **GP** (General Practitioner). Ask at your accommodation, or check the phone book. You may be referred to the nearest hospital but, unless it is a serious injury, it is not a good idea to go there first, as the Accident & Emergency departments at all Irish hospitals are very busy and you could spend hours waiting to be seen.

If you are involved in a road accident, you must call the police to the scene, as otherwise your insurance company will not cover you.

◆ Theft

Take sensible precautions. If the worst happens, report your loss immediately to the nearest **Garda Station** (*Garda Siochana* – "the Guardians of the Peace" – is the Republic's police service) or in the North to the **PSNI** (Police Service of Northern Ireland). You must do this in order to be able to claim from your insurance.

Victim Support

The police will put you in touch with the charitable organization Victim Support, which does its best to sort out any problems you may have if robbed, injured or traumatized.

- ***Dublin Head Office**: ☎ (01) 478-5295; fax 478-5187;www.touristvictimsupport.ie*
- ***National Helpline (in the Republic)**: ☎ (1850) 661-771*
- ***Belfast Head Office**: ☎ (028) 9022-2181; www.victimsupport.org*

Just the Facts

◆ Electrical Current

The standard electricity supply is 220 volts AC in the Republic and 240 volts AC in Northern Ireland (50 cycles), so you'll need a transformer and a plug adapter. Travel adapters, to convert two-pin plugs to the standard three-pin, can be bought at the airport or many electrical suppliers.

◆ Passport

Required for entry into either country but not for travel between the Republic and the North.

◆ Post Offices

Post offices are open weekdays, 9 am-5:30 pm, Saturday until 1 pm.

◆ Travel Insurance

Strongly advised

◆ Emergency Number

Dial 999 and ask for police, fire or ambulance service.

◆ Telephones

When in Dublin, dial phone numbers without the prefix (for example, ☎ 123-4567). For calls to Dublin from anywhere else in the Republic, the prefix (01) is needed. Other prefixes apply in other regions. Note that the more heavily populated regions have seven-digit phone numbers, while the others have only six digits. To call Ireland from

overseas, dial 011 353 (the country code for Ireland), then the local prefix and the number.

*Callsave: Sometimes called **Lo-call**, this is the term for numbers that begin with ☎ 1850 and that are charged at a local rate, wherever you call from in Ireland – much cheaper than the long-distance rate. Numbers prefixed by ☎ 1800 are free.*

◆ Time Zone

Greenwich Mean Time – five hours ahead of New York or EST.

◆ Language

English

◆ What to Pack

Comfortable clothing and sensible shoes; specialized gear if taking part in sports. One smart outfit for dining out; one warm sweater, raingear. In summer bring a light, compact waterproof jacket.

◆ Water Supply

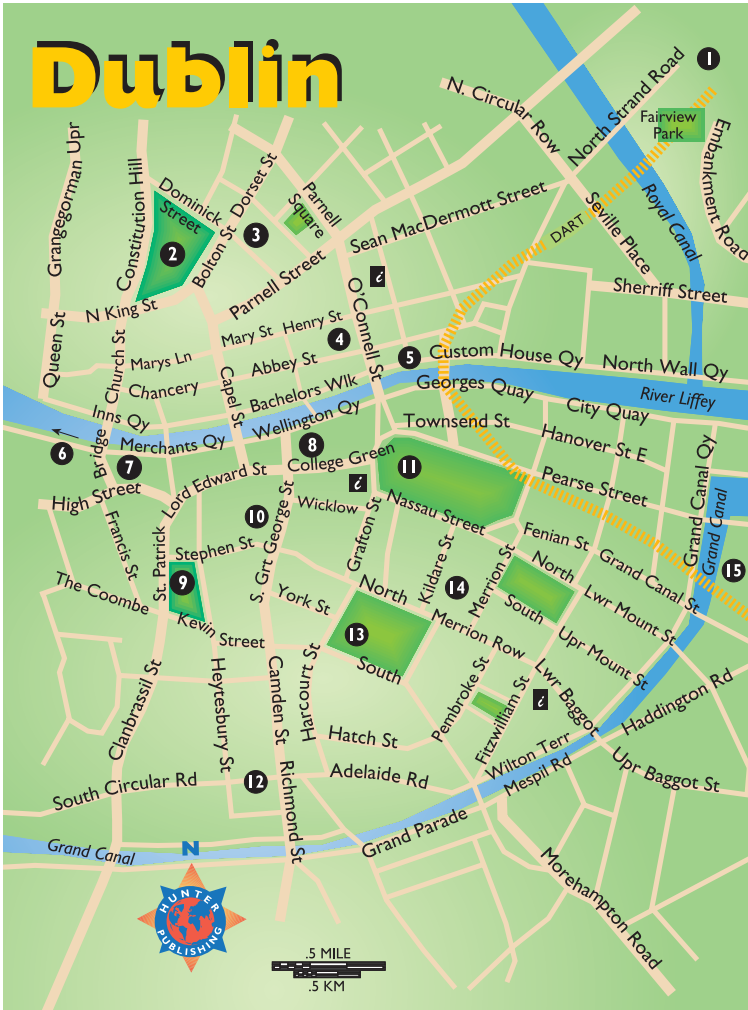
Water is drinkable everywhere. Inexpensive bottled water is available in supermarkets.

◆ Sales Tax

Usually included in bills. Valued Added Tax (VAT) can be reclaimed when leaving the country. Look for signs in shops – you need your passport, and a form needs to be completed in the shop.

◆ Tipping

- 10% of the bill if service charges not included, Service is charged only as part of the bill in larger hotels and upmarket restaurants.
- Taxi drivers and hotel porters expect a small tip.
- Unless drinks are served at your table, a tip is not expected in a pub.



1. Malahide Castle
2. King's Inn
3. Dublin Writers' Museum
4. General Post Office
5. Halfpenny Bridge
6. To Kilmainham Gaol
7. Christ Church Cathedral
8. Temple Bar
9. St. Patrick's Cathedral
10. Dublin Castle
11. Trinity College, Old Library
12. Shaw Birthplace
13. St. Stephen's Green
14. Leinster House
15. James Joyce Museum

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Dublin

Dublin is the Republic of Ireland's capital and largest city, named from the Irish "*dubh linn*" meaning black pool. The name comes from the fact that the site of the city was formerly a black, slimy expanse of mud, through which the River Liffey flowed sluggishly to the sea. It now has a pleasant setting on the east coast of the Irish Sea, looking out over Dublin Bay, with a long sandy shoreline to its north. Granite mountains form the southern boundary of the county, and the city is bisected by the River Liffey.

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It's a cultural city with theaters, cinemas, galleries and museums, as well as many historic sites worth seeing. It also has an excellent range of shops, restaurants, pubs, clubs, plus all types of accommodation.

City of Dublin

◆ History

Dublin appeared as **Eblana** on Ptolemy's map of 140 AD. The **Vikings** arrived around 841, set up a trading post on the south bank of the Liffey, around Islandbridge and Kilmainham, and were defeated by Brian Boru at Clontarf in 1014. After the **Anglo-Norman** conquest of 1169 the city became their seat of power, with a castle near where Dublin Castle stands today.

In the 18th century the city was one of the most elegant anywhere, with its Georgian squares and architecture. Ireland's Parliament met in Dublin in the elegant building opposite Trinity College, now the Bank of Ireland (you had to be a Protestant and male to be elected to

Parliament). Handel performed his *Messiah* for the first time in Dublin in 1742.

All changed with the **Act of Union** (1800) when the city, as a reaction to the French Revolution and the United Irishmen rising, lost its political power to London. Agitation for Home Rule increased over the next 100 years or so, leading to the **Easter Rising** (1916), when the Irish Republic was proclaimed at the General Post Office on O'Connell Street.

Recent Times

Dublin has become a very cosmopolitan city, the economy has greatly improved, and there's been a huge increase in immigrants. Although planning decisions in less prosperous times led to the destruction of many fine buildings and ugly replacements, Dublin is still an attractive city, particularly along the river. There are many wonderful examples of Georgian architecture, along with some good examples of more contemporary design.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Dublin Tourism Center, in a lovely old church on Suffolk Street, off Dame Street, has information on the entire island, and there's a 24-hour touch screen outside. Open July-August, Monday-Saturday, 9 am - 7 pm; Sunday to 3 pm; September-June, Monday-Saturday, 9 am - 5:30 pm; bank holidays, 10:30 am - 3 pm.

◆ Getting Here

Dublin Airport is 10 km (about 6 miles) north of the city center (via N1/M1/E01). The main **railway stations** are Connolly and Heuston.

By Bus

Busárus is the bus station. The **Stationlink** bus connects the railway stations and Busárus, stopping in the city center. There are also frequent buses from Heuston into the center.

Airlink Express Bus links O'Connell Street, Busáras, Connolly Station, Temple Bar and Heuston Station.

Dublin Bus operates other services to the airport. Reach them at 59 Upper O'Connell Street. ☎ (01) 873-4222; info@dublinbus.ie; www.dublinbus.ie.

Aircoach runs every 15 minutes from the airport with 15 stops near main hotels. It also operates to and from Cork, Belfast and Portlaoise. ☎ (01) 844-7118; fax 844-7119; www.aircoach.ie.

By Taxi

Traveling from the airport to the city takes 20-50 minutes, depending on traffic. A taxi stand is outside the airport's Arrivals Hall on the right; rates are displayed in the taxis.

◆ Getting Around

Seeing the city is best done on foot or bus. The county is best explored by bus, DART or car.

Dublin Bus Office, 59 Upper O'Connell Street. ☎ (01) 873-4222; www.dublinbus.ie.

By Rail

DART (Dublin Area Rapid Transit), an electrified train service, runs parallel to the coast from Howth, north of the city, to Bray in Co. Wicklow to the south, with plenty of stops and connections with bus routes. There are three DART stops in the city center – Tara Street, Pearse Street and Connolly Station. It's a cheap and pleasant way of getting around, but avoid peak times when trains are crammed.

Suburban Rail – Arrow Services connect satellite towns in the surrounding counties of Kildare, Louth and Wicklow with the city, from Connolly or Heuston stations.

The Luas – the latest development in Dublin transportation (*Luas* is Irish for speed) – is an on-street light rail/tram system with two branch lines. The **Green Line** connects Sandyford to St. Stephen's Green; the **Red Line** connects Tallaght to Connolly Station. Note that the two lines do not intersect, and there is a 15-minute walk from Abbey Street (Red Line) to St. Stephen's Green; however, tickets for a journey starting on one line and ending on the other are valid for the whole journey. For a route map and more information, see www.luas.ie.

By Bus

Bus tours are the easiest way to explore, especially if time is limited. You can hop on and off, and your ticket gives you reduced entry to some sites. Tickets can be purchased on board, online, from the Tourism Centre and offices, or major hotels. Tours are run by Dublin Bus (see above) and by Irish City Tours, 33 Batchelor's Walk. ☎ (01) 872-9010; www.irishcitytours.com.

Take a breather in one of the city's open spaces. **Phoenix Park**, founded in 1662, is the largest city park in Europe, and **St. Stephen's Green**, laid out as a public park in 1890 by Sir Arthur Edward Guinness, of the drink family, is very close to the center.

◆ Sightseeing

O'Connell Street

O'Connell Bridge

The city's main thoroughfare is wide, flanked by interesting buildings, as well as some unattractive ones.

Despite negative aspects, it is worth seeing the **General Post Office** (GPO), where on Easter Monday, 1916, a group of rebels led by Pádraig Pearse, proclaimed the Irish Republic. British forces shelled it and most of the street from a gunboat in the Liffey. The rebels held out for five days. Eventually, 16 of their leaders were executed and 200 imprisoned; you can still see bullet holes in the building. Inside there's a sculpture by Oliver Sheppard of the mythical Celtic warrior Cúchullain in memory of the Easter Rising heroes.

Dominating the skyline is the **Spire**, seven times the height of the GPO, erected in 2003 to mark the Millennium, standing on the site of Nelson's Column which was blown up by the IRA in 1965. The Spire's tip sways when the wind is strong, but don't worry – that's part of its design.

College Green

Bank of Ireland, College Green

Cross O'Connell Bridge – on the right is the pedestrian Halfpenny Bridge, named for the toll charged from 1821 until the early 1900s. Pass the **Bank of Ireland** on College Green, opposite Trinity College, the home of the Irish Parliament from 1783 to 1801, a marvelous building in neoclassical style. The **Arts Center** in Foster Place next to it houses an interactive museum, also a venue for recitals, exhibitions, and theater. Open Tuesday-Friday, 10 am-4 pm. ☎ (01) 671-1488.

Trinity College

Trinity College

This is the oldest university in Ireland, founded in 1591 by Queen Elizabeth of England. Its cobbled quadrangles are surrounded by cream-colored stone buildings. Famous alumni include Oliver Goldsmith, Edmund Burke, Dean Swift, J. M. Synge, Samuel Beckett, and the author of *Dracula*, Bram Stoker.

The **Douglas Hyde Gallery**, at the Nassau Street entrance to Trinity College, hosts exhibitions of contemporary art. They are open Monday-Friday, 11-6; Thursday, 11-7; Saturday, 11-4:45. ☎ (01) 608-1116.

The Book of Kells, an illuminated manuscript of the gospels, dating from about 806, is now the center of an exhibition on the third floor of the Main Library. Open daily. Monday-Saturday, year-round, 9:30 am-5 pm. Sunday, October-May, noon to 4:30 pm; June-September, 9:30 am-4:30 pm. A combined ticket is available with *The Dublin*

Experience, multimedia audio-visual show telling the city's story (May-September, daily, 10 am-5 pm).

St. Stephen's Green

Sadly, many of the buildings around the Green were demolished to make way for ugly ones in the 1960s, but some older ones remain. **Newman House** on the south side of the green is actually two houses built around 1738 and now named after the cardinal who was the first Rector of the Catholic University of Ireland when it was founded in 1853. Gerald Manley Hopkins, the Jesuit priest and poet, was Professor of Classics here from 1884-89 and his room has been restored. James Joyce was the university's most famous student, here from 1899-1902.

Pond, St. Stephen's Green

Kildare Street

Leinster House, built as the home of the Duke of Leinster in 1745, houses the Oireachtas (the two houses of government), as well as the **National Library** and **Natural History Museum**.

The Archaeology & History branch of the **National Museum** is also on Kildare Street.

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM

There are three branches of the National Museum – Archaeology & History on Kildare Street, Natural History behind it on Merrion Street, and Decorative Arts & History in the former Collins Barracks, away from the center off Ellis Quay, across the river from Heuston Station.

Admission is free except during special exhibitions, and they have free lunchtime and evening lectures too. Open Tuesday-Saturday, 10 am-5 pm, Sunday, 2-5 pm. Guided tours available. ☎ (01) 677-7444; fax 677-7459, marketing@museum.ie. Admission free.

You can travel between the three branches on the Museumlink bus, for a small charge. Tickets are sold in the museums. Service hourly, Monday-Saturday, 8 am-5:30 pm, Sundays, 1-5 pm.

Learn about the country's history and see examples of artifacts, including gold ornaments from the Bronze Age, hoards dating from the Celtic Iron Age, as well as some of the most famous Christian treasures – among them the Ardagh Chalice, the Tara Brooch and the Clonmacnoise Crozier. There's a café as well as a book and gift shop.

A visit here will save you a lot of reading, as the displays cleverly tell you enough about the country and its people to aid your enjoyment as you venture farther afield.

THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

Quaint and delightful, founded in 1857, the NHM houses a collection of animals from all over the world, some now extinct. Personal favorites are the rabbits and hares, the grizzly bear, the basking shark and the giant Irish elk. Anyone interested in fishing will love these exhibits. There's a book and gift shop.

THE MUSEUM OF DECORATIVE ARTS & HISTORY

Displays cover everything from folklife to silver ceramics and glassware to weapons and costume. It's housed in the beautifully restored Collins Barracks and will entertain and enthrall you for hours. There are special events and temporary exhibitions, plus a café and book and gift shop.

THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF IRELAND

The gallery is on Merrion Square with its extension, the **Millennium Wing**, and a second entrance on Clare Street. Admission is free, except for special exhibitions. It has 54 galleries and more than 11,000 works of art, including many examples of Western European art and the most important collection of Irish art.

***Greene's Bookshop** at 16 Clare Street, behind Trinity and close to the entrance to the Millennium Wing of the National Gallery, is worth a stop. It's especially good for books by Irish authors, and you may even bump into a writer or two. ☎ (01) 676-2554; www.greenesbookshop.com.*

TIME SAVER

If your time is limited, concentrate on the Irish art – from the 18th and 19th centuries in the Milltown Wing; modern in the Millennium Wing and the Yeats Museum and Shaw Room, both in the Dargan Wing. The Gallery has a café, a restaurant, and two shops.

Open Monday-Saturday, 9:30 am-5:30 pm, Thursday, to 8:30 pm; Sunday, noon-5:30 pm. ☎ (01) 661-5372; fax (01) 661-5372; artgall@eircom.ie; www.nationalgallery.ie. Free public tours are offered on Saturday at 3 pm and Sunday at 2, 3 and 4 pm; there's also a series of events, and a free brochure gives details.

Temple Bar

Carriage, Temple Bar

Close to the city's center, the area has been developed as a cultural quarter, with the **Irish Film Center**, the **National Photographic Archive**, **Arthouse Multimedia Center**, **Temple Bar Galleries**, plus lots of bars, restaurants, shops. It can be very busy, especially in the evening and on weekends. It attracts young people from all over the country and the UK, who spill out onto the streets with drinks in their hands.

During the summer a free outdoor festival called **Diversions** is held in **Meeting House Square**. It has films, music and other live performances. Pick up a copy of the free guide locally or check the Web site: www.templebar.ie; info@temple-bar.ie, ☎ (01) 677 2255.

You'll probably need to take a taxi or bus to do more sightseeing, although some of the following are within walking distance of the center.

Christ Church Cathedral

Christ Church Cathedral, on Christchurch Place, is Dublin's oldest building, erected in 1038 by the Danish King Sitric, although most of what remains is Norman. Services take place at least three times a day, and all are welcome to attend. Open daily except December 26. Monday to Friday, 9:45 am to 4:30 pm; Saturday, 10 am to 4:30 pm; Sunday, 12:45 to 2:45 pm. Donation requested; tours available.

The cathedral's unique crypt features an exhibition, Treasures of Christ Church. Admission charge. ☎ (01) 677-8099; welcome@cccdub.ie; www.cccdub.ie.

MY FAVORITE & IT'S FREE

The **Chester Beatty Library** is in the Clock Tower building on the grounds of Dublin Castle, and is a very attractive and stimulating place to visit. The collection was donated by American Chester Beatty, who had made his fortune in mining and retired to live here in 1950.

The collection includes manuscripts and objets d'art, as well as early printed books. One floor is devoted to Beatty and his collection and the other to the great religions of the world. There's a peaceful Roof Garden, a gift shop and café, plus special events and temporary exhibitions.

Weekdays, 10 am to 5 pm; Saturday, 11 am to 5 pm, Sunday, 1 to 5 pm; free tours; closed on holidays and on Mondays from October to April; ☎ (01) 407-0750; fax 407-0760; info@cbl.ie; www.cbl.ie.

Marsh's Library, close to Christ Church, was founded in 1701 by Archbishop Narcissus Marsh. It's the oldest public library in the country and holds about 250,000 books, most from the 16th to 18th centu-

ries. The **James Joyce Center** is nearby on North Great George's Street, and the birthplace of **George Bernard Shaw** is on Synge Street.

The Guinness Storehouse, St. James' Gate, is where you learn all about how the "dark stuff" is made and the history of the brewery spanning more than 250 years. Visits end in the Sky Bar with a glass of Guinness and a wonderful view of the city. Open daily year-round, 9:30 am-5 pm, til 8 pm in July and August. Closed December 25 and 26, and Good Friday. ☎ (01) 408-4800.

IMMA – the Irish Museum of Modern Art – is housed in part of what used to be the Royal Hospital Kilmainham where wounded soldiers were looked after. The magnificent neoclassical building, dating from 1680, was modeled on Les Invalides in Paris, and is used for special events.

St. Patrick's Cathedral

St. Patrick's Cathedral is the national cathedral of the Church of Ireland and the largest church in the country. There's been a church on the site since 450 and there's a legend that St. Patrick baptized converts at a well nearby. The present building dates from 1191.

Jonathan Swift, author of *Gulliver's Travels*, was Dean here from 1713-45 and there are lots of reminders of him. Open daily, 9 am-6 pm, except November-February when it closes at 5 pm on Saturdays and 3 pm on Sundays. Visitors of all faiths are welcome. Small admission charge. ☎ (01) 453-9472 (office), 475-4817 (Cathedral); www.stpatrickscathedral.ie.

Kilmainham Gaol opened in 1796; two years later the leaders of the rebellion were imprisoned there. Robert Emmet, Charles Stewart Parnell, Eamon De Valera are just some of the well-known people incarcerated here over the years. The gaol closed in 1924; the leaders of the 1916 Rising were executed by firing squad in the stone-breaking yard. Open year-round; April to September, daily, 9:30 am to

5 pm; October to March, Monday to Saturday to 4 pm and Sunday 10 am to 5 pm. ☎ (01) 453-5984.

*Visit the **Dublin Writers' Museum** , Parnell Square at the top of O'Connell Street; next door is the **Irish Writers' Centre**, which holds readings and other events. ☎ (01) 872-1302; www.writerscentre.ie.*

◆ Adventures

On Foot

Literary Pub Crawl: Two actors perform humorous extracts from city's best-known writers. You'll visit four pubs, and there's a quiz with prizes. Meet upstairs at The Duke, 9 Duke Street, for this two-hour jaunt. April to November, nightly at 7:30 pm; December to March, Thursday, Friday and Saturday at 7:30 pm; year-round, Sundays at noon and 7:30. Book at Tourist Center, Suffolk Street, ☎ (01) 670-5602; fax 670-5603/454-5680; info@dublinpubcrawl.com; www.dublinpubcrawl.com.

Historical Walking Tour: Starts at front gate of Trinity College. Tours are run year-round. April and October, daily, 11 am; May-September, daily, 11 am and 3 pm; November-March, Friday through Sunday, 11 am. ☎ (01) 878-0227; fax 878-3787; tours@historicalinsights.ie; www.historicalinsights.ie.

Trinity College Gate

Musical Pub Crawl: Two professional musicians tell the story of Irish music in 2½ hours. Meet at 7:30, upstairs at Oliver St. John Gogarty's on the corner of Fleet Street and Angelsea Street, Temple Bar. April to October, nightly; February, March and November, Friday and Saturday only. Book at Tourist Center or call on the night you plan to attend. ☎ (01) 478-0193; fax 475-1324; info@musicalpubcrawl.com; www.musicalpubcrawl.com.

The Zozimus Ghostly Experience: Named after a real character, this 1½-hour tour visits scenes of murders, great escapes, and mythi-

cal happenings in the medieval city. Meet at the pedestrian entrance to Dublin Castle on Dame Street. Tour times vary, but usually are 9 pm in summer and 7 pm winter. You must book at Dublin Tourism Center or by phone, ☎ (01) 661-8646; info@zozimus.com; www.zozimus.com.

Other Walking Tours: There is a choice of heritage trails as well, dealing with culture, Georgian buildings, the Old City. They start at the Tourism Center in the church on Suffolk Street, off Dame Street, and can be reserved there.

There are marked trails along the towpaths of both the **Royal Canal**, north of the city center, and the **Grand Canal**, to its south, a pleasant way of exploring Dublin City. For information, phone the Waterways Service of Dúchas, the Heritage Service, ☎ (01) 647-6000.

In & On the Water

BOATING

With its location on Dublin Bay and the River Liffey, the city and county offer many opportunities for water-based activities.

Sailing, kayaking, and canoeing are some of the activities available in the coastal towns, but you don't have to leave the city since **The Surfdock Centre** runs courses and rents equipment. It's at Grand Canal Yard, Ringsend, where it has 42 acres of enclosed freshwater for its courses in kayaking, sailing, and windsurfing. ☎ (01) 668-3945; fax 668-1215; www.surfdock.ie.

SWIMMING

The **National Aquatic Centre**, Blanchardstown, has a pool and a separate diving pool, and Wild Waters park, with a number of novelty water rides. Open to day visitors. ☎ (01) 646-4300.

An unusual way of seeing the city is with **Viking Splash Tours**, in which you travel on a reconditioned Duck. There are 10 tours a day. Check times or book by credit card, ☎ (01) 707-6000; www.vikingsplashtours.com, viking@esatclear.ie. You can also book at Dublin Tourism centers, or at the departure point, 64-5 Patrick Street.

The **Clontarf Yacht and Boat Club** is on the coast just two miles (3.2 km) north of Dublin city center, on the bus and DART routes. ☎ (01) 833-2691; info@cybc.ie.

FISHING

Dublin's waters are managed by the Eastern Regional Fishery Board, and there's loads of information on its Web site at www.fishingireland.net or at info@erfb.ie.

The **Royal Canal** north of the city center and the **Grand Canal** to the south are popular with local anglers, and visitors should contact the local club concerned (listed below).

At Ballybough near Croke Park, the Royal Canal, between locks 1-2, has recently been developed. For **Belcamp Coarse Angling Club**, contact Paul McDonnell. ☎ (01) 847-6120.

There have been good catches of roach, bream and perch along the Royal at Ashtown. The stretch is between locks 9-10 on Scribblestown Road. Contact the **Dublin and District Angling Club**, Secretary David McNiece. ☎ (01) 821-0834.

Members of the local angling club fish the stretch of the Grand Canal from the Lough and Quay pub in Clondalkin to the M50 bridge. Contact John Travers of the **Clondalkin and District Angling Club**, ☎ (01) 457-3793.

The **Portobello Angling Club** runs regular matches during the summer along the Grand Canal between Dolphin's Barn and Portobello, and welcomes visitors. ☎ (01) 453-0430.

For the **Dublin Angling Club**, contact Paul Kelly, ☎ (01) 451 8518.

Outside the city center, among the best places for coarse fishing is the **Pollaphuca Reservoir** at Blessington Lake. You can buy permits from Charles Camping, ☎ (045) 865-351, and Gyves Shop, ☎ (045) 865-153, both in Blessington.

On Horseback

A number of riding stables are within easy reach of the city. Some offer guided trail riding, as well as courses on show jumping and cross-country riding.

Ashdown Riding Stables near Phoenix Park offers trail riding through the park. You can get there easily by bus or car from the center. ☎ (01) 838-3807.

Carrickmines Equestrian Centre, Foxrock, ☎ (01) 295-5990, and **Ballycullen Equestrian Centre**, Knocklyon, Dublin 6, ☎ (01) 494-5415, are both south of the city center.

Others equestrian centers include:

- **Calliaghstown Riding Centre**, Rathcoole, Co. Dublin. ☎ (01) 458-9236.
- **Balcunnin Equestrian Centre** at Skerries offers instruction, trekking and other activities. ☎ (01) 849-0964.
- **Brooke Lodge Riding Centre**, Stepaside, Co. Dublin. ☎ (01) 295-2153.
- **Brackenstown Equestrian Centre**, Knocksadan, Swords, Co. Dublin. ☎ (01) 840-3525.
- **Brittas Lodge Riding Stables**, Blessington Road, Brittas, Co. Dublin. ☎ (01) 458-2726.

◆ Golf

There are more than 50 courses within an hour of the city, ranging from pay-and-play to championship courses.

Deer Park, Howth, is the largest golf complex in Ireland. ☎ (01) 832-2624; fax 839 2405; sales@deerpark.iol.ie.

The City Golf Club, Ballinascorney, eight miles (13 km) southwest of the city center, must have one of the most scenic locations anywhere. There's lots of wildlife and you might share the fairways with deer. ☎ (01) 451-6430; info@dublincitygolf.com.

Corballis, which is at Donabate, north of the city, is the only public links course in the country. It's playable year-round and visitors are always welcome. ☎ (01) 843-6583.

The Royal Dublin Golf Course is a traditional links overlooking Dublin Bay. Visitors welcome; call for hours. It's at North Bull Island, Clontarf, near city center. ☎ (01) 833-6346; fax 833-6504.

Grafton Street

The Malahide Golf Club. ☎ (01) 846-1611; malgc@clubi.ie.

◆ Shopping

Grafton Street, close to Trinity College, is pedestrians-only and full of shops. Some belong to UK chains, others are specialized, and there are plenty of coffee shops and restaurants, including **Bewleys**, a Dublin tradition. Streets radiating off it

are also worth exploring. At the top of Grafton Street is the **Stephen's Green Shopping Center**, with a big selection of shops.

The other main shopping area in the city center is around **Mary Street and Henry Street**, just off O'Connell Street near the GPO.

If thinking about gifts, look for linen or woolens, sold in many shops, and don't restrict yourself to those aimed at tourists. Buy where the Irish themselves do. **The Kilkenny Design Center** on Nassau Street, behind Trinity, has a huge range of Irish-made crafts. **DESIGNYard**, 12 East Essex Street, Temple Bar, has a great selection of contemporary jewelry, ceramics, glass and other items. **The Bridge Gallery**, 6 Upper Ormond Quay, has a similar choice, as well as work by Irish artists.

County Dublin

The county is divided into three administrative areas: **Fingal** to the north, parallel to the coast, and south of the city; **Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown**, and **South Dublin**, farther inland. It's an interesting county, the landscape generally flat, with the Dublin Mountains forming its natural boundary on the southern side, where it meets Co. Wicklow.

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

Fingal Genealogy Centre - Swords Historical Society Ltd, Carnegie Library, North Street, Swords. ☎/fax (01) 840-0080; swordsheritage@eircom.net. **Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Heritage Centre**, Moran Park House, Dun Laoghaire. ☎ (01) 205-4700, ext 406; enaobrien@dlrcoco.ie.

◆ Fingal & North County Dublin

Sightseeing

Start at the **National Botanical Gardens**, where there are about 20,000 different plant species. It's a great place for a walk. The historic curvilinear greenhouses are especially interesting. Open summer, 9 am-6 pm. Sundays, all year from 11 am. Winter, 10 am-4:30 pm. The greenhouse hours vary. ☎ (01) 837-7596/837-4388; fax 836-0080.

1. Bremore Castle
2. Ardgillan Castle & Demesne
3. Skerries Mills, Windmill, Victorian Bakery, Gray Seals
4. Baldongan Castle & Church
5. Round Tower
6. Fingal Arts Centre, Windmill Ruin
7. Bird Sanctuary
8. Newbridge House & Demesne, 19th-century Farm
9. Swords Castle; Marino Casino
10. Malahide Castle & Demesne; Heritage Town
11. Dublin Airport
12. National Botanical Gardens; Glasnevin Cemetery
13. Howth Castle & Gardens; St. Mary's Abbey, Transport Museum
14. Joyce Museum, Martello Tower

Railway Lines

Ferries

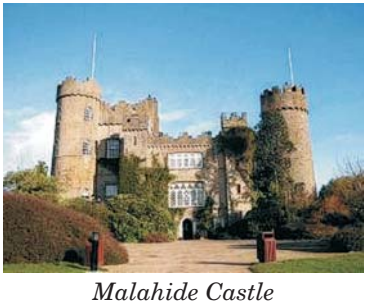
There are free two-hour tours of **Glasnevin Cemetery** next door on Wednesdays and Fridays. Meet at the main gate at 2:30. Since 1832 over a million people have been buried here, among them many of those who shaped Irish history – including Daniel O'Connell, Charles Stewart Parnell, Michael Collins, Constance Marcievicz, Eamon De Valera, Maud Gonne MacBride, and Brendan Behan. ☎ (01) 830-1133, 830-1594; www.glasnevin-cemetery.ie.

There's a wonderful panorama of Dublin Bay from **Howth Head**. **Howth Castle Gardens** has an amazing collection of over 2,000 varieties of rhododendron. There's a bird sanctuary on **Lambay Island**, off the seaside resort of Portrane. **Swords**, inland on the N1, is the administrative capital of Fingal and its **medieval castle** is open to the public.

AUTHOR RECOMMENDS

Just as you leave the city, there's one stop you should make. **Marino Casino**, off the Malahide road, is a delight. Built in 1759, it's a tiny neoclassical building, which only 16 people can tour at one time. Open daily, May-end October, 10 am-5 pm, June-September, to 6 pm. Thursday and Sunday only the rest of year; closed December and January. ☎ (01) 833-1618.

Malahide Castle, in 250 acres of parkland, is in the seaside town of the same name, just north of the city. It belonged to the Talbot family from 1185-1973, and is full of period furniture, fittings and portraits from the National Gallery. The grounds are also open. Open all year, Monday-Saturday, 10 am-5 pm; Sundays and public holidays, 11 am-6 pm, April to October; 11 am-5 pm, November-March. Note that the castle is closed for tours from 12:45 to 2 pm, but the restaurant is open. ☎ (01) 846-2184; fax 846-2537; malahidecastle@dublintourism.ie.



Malahide Castle

Combined tickets are available with **Fry Model Railway** in the Castle grounds, which is delightful. It's a collection of handmade models of Irish trains built up in the 1920s and '30s by Cyril Fry, a railway engineer and draughtsman. Open April-September only, Monday-Saturday, 10 am-5 pm. Closed 1-2 pm; Sundays and public holidays, 2-6 pm. ☎ (01) 846-3779; fax 846-3723; fryrailway@dublintourism.ie.

SKERRIES

The harbor at Skerries is busy in summer and it's the major landing port for Dublin Bay prawns. It has a long, safe and sandy beach, with a pleasant grass promenade running along beside it to **Red Island Scenic Park**, from where there are lovely views.

You can visit two restored windmills dating from 1821-39. Skerries Mills Heritage Centre houses exhibitions of agricultural and milling equipment; there's art on display, a very good craft shop, and relaxing tea rooms. ☎ (01) 849-5208; www.skerrieshomepage.f2s.com.

Ardgillan House (1738) looks like a castle, and this historic home and its grounds are open to the public. The park is open year-round during daylight hours. There are tours of the house daily in summer; call to check times. ☎ (01) 849-2212.

Adventures

ON FOOT

North of the city there are many walks, including those around the **Hill of Howth**, in the **Ward River Valley** in Swords, or along the **beaches**. Call Fingal Tourism for details, ☎ (01) 840-0077.

*At **Courtlough Shooting Grounds**, near Balbriggan, you can learn clay pigeon shooting, ☎ (01) 841-3096; fax 841-5462.*

ON WATER

Boating

Head for the **Malahide Village Marina**, a few miles north, for a trip with a difference – a Sea Safari. Trips are run in small RIBs – rigid inflatable boats. Lifejackets and waterproof gear are supplied and, ex-

cept in foul weather, trips run all year. ☎ (01) 806-1626; info@seasafari.ie. Book online at www.seasafari.ie.

Skerries has a sailing school on Harbour Road. Contact Paul Hick at ☎ (01) 849-0363. Or you can call **Skerries Sailing Club** at ☎ (01) 849-1233.

Sailing trips locally and longer can be organized by contacting P. McNally, Seabreezes, Quay Street, Skerries. ☎ (01) 849-1446.

Fishing

Balbriggan, Skerries, Loughshinny and Rush are all boat angling venues where you fish around Lambay Island. The first three are also good shore angling locations. Other shore fishing places include the Rogerstown Estuary, Donabate Strand, the Malahide Estuary and the three-mile-long Velvet Strand at Portmarnock.

There's pier, rock and boat fishing at Howth and Sutton, with ground fishing around the island of Ireland's Eye and on the Kish Bank. There's a scenic cliff walk around Howth to The Baily (or access it via Thormanby Road), though care needs to be taken on the rocks as they become slippery in wet weather. Beach fishing at Dollymount Strand and Poolbeg Lighthouse is particularly popular during mackerel season.

◆ South County Dublin

Sightseeing

Attractions in South County Dublin include the **Corkagh Regional Park**, the **Dodder Valley Linear Park** and the **Dublin Mountains**, all great for walks. Also worth seeing in this part of County Dublin are **Fernhill Gardens** in Sandyford and **Dalkey Castle and Heritage Centre**. Drive or cycle around **Killiney Hill**, passing the homes of the rich and famous, and you get wonderful views over Dublin Bay.

Fernhill Gardens

Heading towards Dun Laoghaire along the coast you pass the **salt marsh** at Booterstown, a bird sanctuary. At Sandycove there's the

James Joyce Museum in a Martello tower dating from the Napoleonic Wars of the 19th century.

Dun Laoghaire is an interesting town which, though now a city suburb, retains its distinct character and the atmosphere of previous centuries. Take a bracing walk on its pier and watch the ferries arriving and departing across the Irish Sea. The **National Maritime Museum** is also worth a visit.

Adventures

ON FOOT

Take the DART or bus south of the city to **Dalkey** and there's a lovely walk from there. Start on Dalkey Avenue at the Post Office and head south. About half a mile farther there's a road on your left that climbs through fields and is the entrance to Dalkey Hill Park. Steps from the car park take you to the top of the hill, from where you get the most amazing views over the bay, with the Wicklow Hills in the distance.

Nearby is **Killiney Hill** which, like Dalkey Hill, drops steeply into the sea, and is topped by an obelisk. There's a trail from it down to Vico Road, where there's a lovely seaside walk.

*The **Killiney Adventure Company** offers hill-walking, orienteering, rock climbing and abseiling, ☎ (01) 276-2800.*

You can take the DART to its southern terminus at **Bray**, which is in Co. Wicklow. Follow the promenade south through the town to where it begins to climb to Bray Head. It branches to the left and this cliffside walk will take you the 3½ miles (5.6 km) to **Greystones**, a great way to clear your head and enjoy glorious views back towards Killiney, Dalkey and Bray itself. At Greystones you can get the train back.

The beautiful **Dublin Mountains** south of the city can be reached easily by bus.

ON WATER

At Seapoint, just north of Dun Laoghaire, and on the DART, is the **Wind & Wave Centre**, offering windsurfing and canoeing lessons and equipment rental. ☎ (01) 284-4177.

Sandymount Strand attracts shore fishermen and **Dun Laoghaire** is popular for both boat and shore angling from both the east and west piers and the harbor. Boats head out from here to fish around **Scotsman's Bay** and **Dalkey Island**.

Charles Robinson Sea Angling Charters. ☎ (0404) 68751.

Dun Laoghaire Boat Charter. ☎ (01) 282-3426.

Continuing south, at **Bullock and Coliemore Harbor** inshore self-drive boats are available for hire. ☎ (01) 280-6517 (Bullock Harbor) and ☎ (01) 283-4298 Coliemore Harbor.

Killiney Beach is another popular location for shore fishing.

Spectator Sports

There are three racecourses within easy reach of the city. **Leopardstown Racecourse** is only six miles (10 km) south of the city center, ☎ (01) 289-3607; www.leopardstown.com. **Punchestown Racecourse** is near Naas, in neighbouring Co. Kildare, 30 minutes away by road, ☎ (045) 897-704, racing@punchestown.com, www.punchestown.com, and **Fairyhouse Racecourse**, 12 miles (19 km) northwest of Dublin at Ratoath, Co. Meath, ☎ (01) 825-6167, info@fairyhouseracecourse.ie, www.fairyhouseracecourse.ie.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Watch the best riders from Ireland and overseas at the **Dublin Horse Show**, which takes place in August at the RDS Arena. As well as the excitement of the jumping competitions, there are lots of other events. It's friendly and entertaining, and could be the highlight of a vacation. See http://www.rds.ie/horseshow/about.htm for details.

There are local **GAA** (Gaelic Athletic Association) matches at Croke Park, and rugby and soccer at Landsdowne Road. For details, check

in newspapers, ask at your hotel, guest house, tourist information centers, or check online on the Dublin Tourism Web site. There is also a **greyhound** stadium at Shelbourne Park.

Entertainment

There are many theaters and cinemas in Dublin City and surrounding towns. Among them are the famous **Abbey Theatre** and the **Gate Theatre**, **Andrew's Lane Theatre** (which also has a small studio), and **The Olympia**. **The Point** hosts musicals, often from London's West End, and concerts by big name stars. North of the city is **The Helix**, which presents touring productions and concerts, and the **Pavilion Theatre** is south of the city in Dun Laoghaire. The **National Concert Hall** is the venue for all sorts of music. There are concerts in the **National Gallery** at times.

Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann organizes evenings of traditional music, song, dance, and storytelling all over Ireland, and publishes a free leaflet. It's based in Monkstown, Co. Dublin, where they host evenings. ☎ (01) 280-0295; www.comhaltas.com.

Check if there are lunchtime shows or recitals – they're often cheaper than in the evenings, and sometimes are free. In the parks there may be free concerts on bandstands. In Dublin you often get the chance to see international acts and shows at a fraction of what you'd pay in London or New York. Avoid entertainment aimed at tourists only and go where the Irish go. Book at box offices and save paying booking fees.

GAY LIFE IN DUBLIN

Take a look at ***Gay Community News*** to find out what's on. The most comprehensive Web sites for gay organizations, events, issues, and information are **Gay Ireland Online** (www.gay-ireland.com), **Outhouse** (www.outhouse.ie) and **Dublin's Queer Guide** (www.dublinqueer.com). Local gay and lesbian bars, clubs, venues and organizations, including the Irish Film Centre, have special gay events. Helplines: **Lesbians Organizing Together**, ☎ (01) 872-7770, and **Gay Switchboard Dublin**, ☎ (01) 872-1055.

Where to Stay

For accommodations pricing guide, see page 51.

◆ Hotels

There is a huge choice of accommodations in Dublin. For good value try a **Jurys Inn** (www.jurysdoyle.com), where you pay per room (breakfast not included); there are three in the city center. Also suited to those on a tight budget are bed & breakfast or guesthouse accommodations; details are available on the Dublin Web site, www.visitdublin.com.

Lynams Hotel, 63/64 O'Connell Street, used to be the home of the inventor of the Tilly lamp, and retains the intimacy of a private house. You couldn't be more central staying here, a few steps from the historic General Post Office. There's a pleasant sitting room where you can read, and the bedrooms are fine, pleasantly decorated. Breakfast is served in the restaurant on the ground floor, which is open all day. From $$. ☎ (01) 888-0886; fax 888-0890; lynams.hotel@indigo.ie; www. lynams-hotel.com.

Clarion Stephens Hall Hotel and Suites. Their 33 suites are ideal for anyone who likes a choice as you can dine in the restaurant, order food in your room, or cook for yourself. Suites are spacious, with a hallway, large bedroom with plenty of closet space, a bathroom, large sitting-room and a dining area/kitchenette.

It really is a home away from home where you can enjoy privacy while using the hotel services, including daily cleaning. There's a lounge bar and the restaurant has a terrace. It is just off St. Stephen's Green, so is very convenient for anyone exploring the city or attending an event at the National Concert Hall, just around the corner. Suites from $$. Earlsfort Centre, Lower Leeson Street, toll-free ☎ 800-CLARION, (01) 638-1111; fax 638-1122; stephens@premgroup.com; www.choicehotelsireland.ie.

Avalon House, 55 Aungier Street, Dublin 2, a member of the Independent Holiday Hostels organization, is centrally located close to St. Stephen's Green and within walking distance of most places of interest. They offer single- , twin- , four- and multi-bedded rooms. It's open on a 24-hour basis, has a café or you can cook for yourself. There is secure bike and luggage storage, money-changing facility and really

helpful staff. Online reservations. ☎ (01) 4750-0001; fax 4750-0303; info@avalon-house.ie; www.avalon-house.ie.

☆☆☆☆☆ **The Westin** is almost on O'Connell Bridge, and across the road from Trinity College. It's a wonderful place to stay, hidden behind the listed façade of the former Allied Irish Bank (1863), with some of its features retained and restored. Some of the guestrooms overlook a central atrium, others the Georgian and Victorian landmarks of central Dublin.

The bedrooms are beautifully furnished and spacious. The staff is charming and unobtrusive. This is a relaxing place to stay, close to all the city's attractions, yet peaceful. Overnight parking for a very small fee can be arranged in advance.

From the elegant **Exchange Restaurant** you can look out on the city without passersby seeing you. It serves excellent Irish and International cuisine.

From 9 am to 11 pm, **The Atrium** is a beautiful place to relax over a coffee, a drink or a light meal, as its glass ceiling means it's always flooded with light. At night you can do a bit of star-gazing. **The Mint Bar** downstairs attracts Dubliners and is pleasantly casual; you can also eat here in daytime. $$$ (for two), ☎ (01) 604-0400; fax 865-6390; www.starwood.com.

☆☆☆☆☆ **Berkeley Court** is on Landsdowne Road, Ballsbridge, just five miles (eight km) from Dublin Airport or Heuston Station and only two miles from the city center. It's in an attractive and quiet part of Dublin, yet only a short taxi ride from all the city's attractions, and very close to bus routes and a DART station.

The bedrooms are spacious and pleasantly furnished. Indeed, that's the impression you get the moment you walk in – spaciousness, as you are immediately in a lounge with comfortable seating, where you can relax, have breakfast, a snack or a drink. There's a bar off the lounge, half of it furnished like a library, with a real fire. There's a choice of dining, with the **Palm Court** serving contemporary cuisine, and the award-winning **Berkeley Room**. Rates from $$$, ☎ (01) 660-1711; fax 661-7238; berkeleycourt@jurysdoyle.com; www.jurysdoyle.com.

◆ Camping & RV Parks

☆☆☆☆ **The Camac Valley Caravan and Camping Park** is on the N7 Naas Road in Clondalkin in South County Dublin and is open all year. It's a spacious site with top-class facilities set next to a 300-acre park that's ideal for walking. ☎ (01) 464-0644; fax 464-0643; www.camacvalley.com, reservations@camacvalley.com.

☆☆ **The North Beach Caravan and Camping Park** is north of Dublin City at Rush, where most of its sites overlook the Irish Sea. It's set on the edge of the delightful sandy North Beach, which is safe for swimming and watersports. Open April 1 to September 30. ☎/fax (01) 843-7131; info@northbeach.ie; www.northbeach.ie.

Where to Eat

◆ Author Recommends

There's an enormous choice of places to eat in the center, especially in Temple Bar, and around Grafton Street and Dame Street. My favorite place to eat in Dublin is the **Trocadero** on St. Andrew Street, very near the Tourism Centre. On its menu are seafood, steaks, traditional Irish cuisine and alternatives for vegetarians. The food is good, but that's not the only reason I love it. It's been there since 1956 and has always been popular with people from the film and theater world, who know they'll be well treated but not fawned over by the marvelous staff, who have worked here for years. The walls are covered with autographed photographs, and you often see famous faces eating here, not just Irish but international too. Booking is strongly advised. ☎ (01) 677-5545; fax 679-2385.

Beshoff's, 14 Westmoreland Street, near O'Connell Bridge, also 5 Upper O'Connell Street. Dublin's most famous fish and chip shops are great value. They're open every day, year-round, from 11am to 11 pm, except December 25 and 26. Open until 3 am Friday and Saturday at Westmoreland Street. ☎ (01) 677-8026; info@beshoffsrestaurants.ie; www.beshoffrestaurants.ie.

Travel Information

Dublin Tourism has information and reservation centers at a number of locations. To call within Ireland, ☎ 1850-230-330; from elsewhere, ☎ 00-353-66-979-2083; www.visitdublin.com. They have several locations:

- Arrivals Hall, Dublin Airport, open seven days all year, 8 am-10 pm.
- Ferry Terminal, Dun Laoghaire Harbour, open all year, Monday-Saturday, 10 am-1 pm, 2-6 pm.
- 14 Upper O'Connell Street, Dublin, open Monday-Saturday all year, 9 am-5 pm.
- Baggot Street Bridge, Baggot Street, Dublin 2. Open all year, Monday-Friday, 9:30 am-5 pm, closed noon-12:30.
- The Square Towncentre, Tallaght, Dublin 24. Open all year, Monday-Saturday, 9:30 am-5 pm, closed noon-12:30.

Fingal Tourism, ☎ (01) 840-0077, fax 840-4988; info@fingaltourism.ie; www.fingal-dublin.ie.

The **Northern Ireland Tourist Board** office is at 16 Nassau Street, behind Trinity College. ☎ (01) 679-1977, fax (01) 679-1863, infodublin@nitb.com.

East Coast & Midlands

This region brings together eight of the Republic's 32 counties – the coastal counties of Louth, Wicklow, and Meath with the inland Kildare, Laois, Offaly, Westmeath, and Longford – each unique and with a lot to offer visitors. It stretches from the beaches of the east coast and the mountains of Wicklow, the Cooley Peninsula and the Slieve Blooms, to the Bog of Allen and River Shannon in the Midlands, and is the most varied of the Republic's regions.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Coastal Counties

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- County Meath. 131

Inland Counties

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- County Offaly 157
- County Laois 167
- County Westmeath 175
- County Longford 187

It's traversed by both the Grand Canal and the Royal Canal, which link Dublin to the River Shannon, and by the River Barrow, winding its way through wooded valleys to Co. Carlow and eventually joining the Grand Canal with the tidal waters of the Barrow estuary.

There really are activities for everyone, with fine parkland and links golf courses, freshwater and sea angling, wonderful equestrian facilities, great walking terrain, and relaxing cruises on its waterways. There's also a huge choice of accommodations, places to eat, and plenty of entertainment of all kinds. Its visitor attractions include ancient monuments, among them Newgrange, heritage sites such as Glendalough and Clonmacnoise, and historic houses and gardens.

The area has a wide range of excellent game, coarse and sea fishing locations. Salmon, sea-trout and brown trout fishing are available on a number of rivers, and there are also several lakes, especially in Meath, Westmeath, Longford and Offaly. The extensive coastline, from Carlingford Lough to where Co. Wicklow meets Co. Wexford, also offers lots of opportunities for the sea angler.

Mid-Ireland is marketed as **Ely O'Carroll Mid Ireland**, and you see road signs with the symbol "**e**," encouraging you to journey on the N52 from Roscrea in neighboring county Tipperary to Kilbeggan in Co. Westmeath, with information points and free brochures available.

The Coastal Counties

County Louth

Louth, the smallest county on the island, is on the east coast, on the border halfway between Dublin and Belfast. It's named after Lugh, the great god of the Celts, and its Cooley peninsula was the legendary home of the giant, Finn McCool, and the setting of Ulster's greatest saga, the *Táin*. That's the epic folk tale of the hero *Cúchullain*, the Red Branch Knights of Ulster, wicked Queen Maeve of Connaught and the mighty Brown Bull of Cooley. (Read her story on page 9.)

Most of the county's landscape is unspoiled and flat, with a low sandy coastline, except in the north, where the Carlingford Peninsula is hilly, with its highest point Slieve Foy, at 1,933 feet.

Despite its size, Louth offers a great choice of activities – sailing and scuba diving, sea and river fishing, horseback riding, hill walking, rock climbing, golf, exploring historical sites, and great traditional hospitality in its many pubs, restaurants, inns, guesthouses and hotels. Among the many interesting places to visit is the site of the Battle of the Boyne, which changed Irish history and influences events even today.

Dundalk is its largest town and county capital; its other main towns are **Drogheda** and **Ardee**.

◆ Getting Here

By Car

Dundalk is on the **N1** from Dublin (53 miles/85 km) and the **N1-A1-M1** from Belfast (52 miles/84 km); the **N52-N80-N8** from Cork (202 miles/325 km) and the **N52-N6** from Galway (148 miles/238 km).

Drogheda is 35 miles (56 km) north of Dublin on the N1.

Ardee is on the main Dublin-Derry route, the **N2**, and the Dundalk-Mullingar route, the **N52**.

East Coast & Midlands

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1. Carlingford; the Tain Way
2. Mellifont Abbey
3. Hill of Tara; Bective Abbey
4. Glencree
5. Glen of Immal
6. Glenmalure
7. Glenmacnass
8. Glendalough
9. Sally Gap
10. Blessington House
11. Devil's Glen
12. Vale of Avoca
13. St. Columb's Church, St. Columcille's House
14. Slane Castle
15. Trim Castle
16. Maynouth Castle
17. St. Brigid's Cathedral
18. White Castle, Athy
19. Allen Bog, Clara Bog
20. Slieve Bloom Mountains
21. Grange Castle
22. Birr Castle Demesne
23. Rock of Dunamase, Maryborough Heath
24. Heywood Gardens, Ballinakill
25. Emo Court House & Gardens
26. Aghmacart Priory, Durrow
27. Belvedere House
28. Uisneach Hill, Catstone
29. Athlone Castle
30. Goldsmith Country Pallas, Co. Longford
31. Tullymully Castle, Castlepollard

NOT TO SCALE

By Rail

Dundalk and Drogheda are on the mainline railway between Dublin and Belfast. Rail Station, Dundalk, ☎ (042) 933-5529. Rail Station, Drogheda, ☎ (041) 983-8749.

By Bus

The county has a very good bus service, with Dundalk and Drogheda on the express services to and from Dublin and Belfast. Bus Station, Dundalk, ☎ (042) 933-4075.

◆ Tourist Information

East Coast & Midlands Tourism, Dundalk Tourist Office, Jocelyn Street, open all year. ☎ (042) 933-5484; fax 933-8070; dundalktouristoffice.tinet.ie.

Drogheda Tourist Office, Bus Éireann, open all year. ☎ (041) 983-7070.

Carlingford Tourism Office, seasonal opening. ☎ (042) 937-3033; carlingfordtourism@hotmail.com.

The **Midlands East Regional Tourism Organisation** is responsible for counties Kildare, Laois, Longford, Louth, Meath, North Offaly, Westmeath and Wicklow and is based in Mullingar. ☎ (044) 48761, www.elyocarroll.com. Also see www.carlingford.ie and www.louth-holidays.com.

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

If your ancestors came from Louth, you should contact the **Meath-Louth Family Research Centre**, Mill Street, Trim, Co. Meath. ☎ (046) 943-6633; fax 943-7502.

◆ Sightseeing

Dundalk

Dundalk is a busy manufacturing town at the head of the bay bearing its name. As *Dún Dealga* in Celtic times it was a fortress guarding the pass through the mountains into Ulster. Vikings, Anglo-Normans and the English have fought to hang onto it over the centuries, so little is left. Its only significant medieval features are the bell tower of the Franciscan Friary (1240) and the tower of St. Nicholas' Church (14th

century). The Courthouse (1818) is modeled on the Temple of Theseus in Athens and the exterior of St. Patrick's Catholic Cathedral, also 19th century, on King's College Chapel, Cambridge.

Lord Dungannon introduced the linen trade to Dundalk in 1699. Buildings were erected to house the looms, but the trade only really began to prosper in the 19th century, and you can see some of the flamboyant townhouses with their Italianate facades dating from that time.

Today, Dundalk flourishes as a shopping, business and administrative center, not only for Co. Louth, but also for neighboring counties. Its location half-way between Dublin and Belfast has also led to many cross-border links with Newry.

On Jocelyn Street is **Louth County Museum** housed in a beautifully restored late 18th-century warehouse. As well as permanent displays, it also hosts a number of events, including plays, recitals and temporary exhibitions. ☎ (042) 932-7056; fax 932-7058; dlkmuseum1@eircom.net.

Drogheda

Drogheda, 22 miles (35 km) south of Dundalk, is a busy port and industrial center that developed from a settlement around a ford crossing of the River Boyne. The Vikings arrived in 911 and built the first bridge, which accounts for its name, *Droichead Atha* – Norse for "bridge across the ford."

St. Laurence's Gate

St. Laurence's Gate was built in the late 13th century, and is the only one of the town's 10 medieval gates to have survived. It's now one of the best-preserved in the country.

The huge earthen mound called **Millmount** is the town's most noticeable feature; though never excavated, it's believed to cover prehistoric graves. There's a restored Martello tower on top that offers views of the town. The town's street plan hasn't changed significantly since the 13th century.

Nearby is the **Millmount Museum** in the officers' mess of an 18th-century military barracks. Its exhibits include the only surviving guild banners in the country, and a hand-powered vacuum cleaner dating from 1860. ☎ (041) 983-3097; info@millmount.net.

In the **Millmount Craft Centre** you can buy work by contemporary artists.

Cromwell's troops massacred about 2,600 of the town's garrison and citizens in 1649; many were burnt to death in **St. Peter's Church**, where they had sought refuge. The present church dates from 1753, and was designed by famous Irish architect Francis Johnston. In a second St. Peter's Church on West Street, erected in his memory, you can see the preserved head of Oliver Plunkett, Archbishop of Armagh, who was made a saint in 1975 (the first Irishman in more than 700 years). He was executed in 1681 in London for allegedly taking part in a plot against the Crown.

Mellifont Abbey

The ruins of **Mellifont Abbey**, at Collon, six miles (10 km) west of Drogheda, are worth a look. It was built in 1142 as the first Cistercian monastery in Ireland, and for nearly 400 years was one of the most important religious foundations in the country, with 38 other monasteries under its rule. In 1539 it was closed by King Henry VIII and handed over to Sir Edward Moore, who turned the church into a fortified mansion. It couldn't withstand Cromwell's soldiers in 1649 and ended up as a pigsty.

HIGH CROSSES

High crosses, or Celtic crosses, as they are also known, are found throughout Ireland on old monastic sites. Some were probably used as meeting points for religious ceremonies and others were used to mark boundaries. The earliest crosses in Ireland were made of wood and metal and probably much smaller than the great stone monuments we see today. The Western Ossory group of high crosses are thought to be among the earliest examples of stone crosses to be found in Ireland, because their design imitates the earlier wood and metal crosses; a recent study suggests they may date to the mid-ninth century.

Not far away is **Monasterboice** and the remains of the monastic settlement founded by St. Buite in the fifth century. One of the best surviving round towers, over 100 feet high and with a base that's over 50 feet across, and two of the most perfect 10th-century high crosses are on the site. ☎ (041) 982-6459.

AN IMPORTANT SITE

The site of the **Battle of the Boyne** is on the south bank of the river, near Drogheda on the Oldbridge Estate, signposted off the N51 road to Slane. Here, King William III and his father-in-law, King James II, fought in 1690, on July 12, according to the modern calendar. At stake were the British throne, French dominance of Europe and Protestant power in Ireland. Visits are free, and access is by guided tour only. You are advised to wear suitable clothing and footwear, as the terrain is uneven. Open daily, May 1 to September 30, 10 am to 6 pm, last admission 45 minutes before closing. ☎ (041) 984-9873; fax 984-9876; www.battleoftheboyne.ie, battleoftheboyne@duchas.ie. There are also self-guided walks on the Oldbridge Estate.

Ardee

Ardee, on the N2, is a pretty little market town on the bank of the River Dee. It takes its name from the Irish, *Ard Fhirdia*, the ford on the river Dee where the legendary Irish hero Cúchulainn, champion of Ulster, killed his foster brother Ferdia, the champion of the south. The foundation of the town is attributed to the Norman knight Gilbert de Pippard, from whom the Pepper families descend, who obtained a grant of the barony of Ardee from Prince John in 1185 and who was responsible for the construction of the motte-castle on the eastern side of the town known today as **Castleguard**. The town walls date from the late 14th and early 15th centuries, but only fragments now remain.

The town was often the mustering point for the English when they were attacking Ulster, because of its strategic location at a crossroads on the northern boundary of the **Pale** (see page 11). There are two 13th-century castles in the town. **Ardee Castle** (St. Leger's) is the largest fortified tower house in Ireland, with a museum in its square keep. **Hatch's Castle** on Market Street got its name because

it was given to the Hatch family during the Cromwellian Plantation (see page 12).

The Cooley Peninsula

King John's Castle, Carlingford

If your time in County Louth is limited, don't miss the Cooley Peninsula. **Carlingford** is the capital of Cooley, which juts out north of Dundalk, 14 miles (22.5 km) away, facing the Mountains of Mourne in Co. Down to the north across the Lough bearing its name. It is an absolutely delightful place to visit. Although it is so near to both Newry and Dundalk, you feel as if you are in another world, because it has such a peaceful and untouched atmosphere.

Driving from Newry to Carlingford along the R173, you reach the pretty village of **Omeath**, and directly behind it on the slopes of Slieve Foy is the **Long Woman's Grave**, dating from megalithic times. According to the story, Cauthleen, the tall Spanish wife of Lorcan O'Hanlon, "died of disappointment" when she arrived in Ireland and saw the home with a spectacular view (but few amenities) promised by her husband.

Carlingford is one of Ireland's Heritage Towns, and the best preserved from the medieval period, founded by the Anglo-Normans in the 12th century. It retains much of its original layout as a linear settlement, with defensive walls and narrow streets. It's a peaceful and attractive small town, really a village, and is ideal as a base for touring the Cooley Peninsula and the area around Carlingford Lough.

Carlingford is only 10 miles (16 km) from Newry. Its setting is lovely, with great views of the sea and mountains. The name comes from Norse – "the fjord of Carlinn" – but although its sheltered harbor on the Lough may have been used as a base for Viking raiding parties, no signs of them have survived.

Take a walk around Carlingford, which is very rewarding. The Heritage Centre is in the tower of the original town wall, now part of the

old Holy Trinity Church, and has an exhibition on the area's history. ☎ (042) 937-3454.

Among the fascinating buildings in the village is the 12th-century **King John's Castle**, which guards the harbor entrance from an elevated position. **Taafe's Castle** (15th century) is a good example of a castellated town house with its battlements, murder holes, slits for archers and barrel-vaulted basement. You can also see the ruins of the **Abbey**, a Dominican Friary founded by Richard de Burgo, Earl of Ulster, in 1305; the **Mint**; and the **Tholsel** (medieval toll house), both dating from the 15th century.

◆ Adventures

On Foot

At **Ardee**, there's a pleasant walk along the River Dee to the site of the battle between Cúchulainn and Ferdia. Just west of town is the only remaining raised bog on the east coast, where you find flora and fauna not seen elsewhere. It's worth a stroll. The Cooley Peninsula provides excellent, moderate hill walking, particularly in the Cooley Mountains and Slieve Foy. You'll come across interesting archaeological sites, including the **Proleek Dolmen**, on the western end of the peninsula, near Ravensdale. It's a 5,000-year-old tomb with three upright stones and a 46-ton capstone which, according to local folklore, was left by a giant. Nearby, a huge gallery grave, roughly outlined by rocks, is said to be the last resting place of the Scottish giant, Ruiscare, who lost a battle with Irish giant, Finn McCool. **Ravensdale Forest** offers enjoyable short walks.

The **Táin Trail** is the main long-distance walk in the county. It starts and ends in Carlingford and takes you 16 miles (26 km) through the beautiful surrounding countryside.

On Wheels

County Louth is ideal for traveling by bike. Among suggested routes are the Cooley Cycle and the East Coast Cycle.

The Cooley Cycle (50miles/80 km) starts at Dundalk, loops around Dromad, runs beside Ravensdale Forest Park, climbing steeply before descending towards Omeath, with fantastic views

over Carlingford Lough. You pass through Carlingford, Greenore, Ballymacscanlon, then return to Dundalk.

The East Coast Cycle (34 miles/54 km) also starts at Dundalk and ends in Drogheda. Head south on N52 Ardee road, turning left at the Readypenny Inn, continue through Castlebellingham, where you take the Annagassan road from the village square. Next follow signs for "scenic route" along the coast, passing through Clogherhead, Termonfeckin, Baltray, and then the mouth of the River Boyne and into Drogheda.

The **Táin Trail Cycling Route** is the longest and most historic in Ireland. It runs for 365 miles (588 km) from Co. Roscommon to the Cooley Peninsula, and back again, with 95 miles (153 km) of it in Louth. It's inspired by the ancient Irish saga, *The Táin* or the *Cattle Raid of Cooley*, and follows (as closely as possible) the path of Queen Maeve and her armies in their pursuit of the great Brown Bull of Cooley (see page 9). (*Táin* is pronounced to rhyme with coin.)

The route is marked by distinctive Brown Bull finger-post signs (they look like a pointing finger), as well as striking pictorial maps in towns along the route, including Ardee, Carlingford and Dundalk, in the Co. Louth section. It passes the battle sites where Cúchulainn and Maeve's armies met in bloody combat and offers the opportunity to visit many of the most important heritage sites and visitor attractions in County Louth.

There's an attractive and useful brochure-map, available from tourist offices. The route can be walked as well, of course. For further information, contact: Irish Cycle and Cycling Holidays, Unit 6, Ardee Enterprise Centre. ☎ (041) 685-3772; fax 685-3809; irch@iol.ie; www.irish-insight.com/irish-cycle-hire. For more information on the epic itself, take a look at www.thetain.com.

On Water

Blackrock, three miles (4.8 km) south of Dundalk, is a small seaside village, which is popular for sail boarding, as the water is shallow.

Carlingford Lough is popular for sailing and windsurfing as it's sheltered and without strong tides, and there are a number of harbors on both shores. In the harbor, **Carlingford Marina** has 200 berths and is an ideal base for visiting yachts; facilities include fuel and a chandlery. ☎ (042) 937-3073; www.carlingfordmarina.com.

Carlingford Adventure Centre, based in an old bonded warehouse encircling the medieval Mint, offers a choice of activities. Among them are sailing, kayaking, canoeing, windsurfing, abseiling, mountain walking, rockclimbing, orienteering, and archery. You can also take courses in sailing, windsurfing and powerboating here. They cater to day visitors as well as those staying in their hostel. ☎ (042) 937-3100; fax 937-3651; info@carlingfordadventure.com; www.carlingfordadventure.com.

FISHING

You'll find the best salmon and sea trout fishing on the **Ballymascanlon River**, northeast of Dundalk, the **River Glyde** at Castlebellingham, the **River Boyne** near Drogheda and the **Cooley River**.

Ask at Tourist Information or in local tackle shops on the Cooley Peninsula about specific stretches of water, permits and licenses. Salmon and sea trout are caught from February to September, and brown trout from March to September. From the pier at Carlingford you can catch dogfish, flatfish, occasional ray and conger.

Sea angling is plentiful along the over 60 miles (100 km) of coast. As well as Carlingford Lough, good fishing areas include Gyles Quay, Annagassan, Clogherhead, Termonfeckin and the Baltray/Drogheda area.

Clogherhead is the most popular sea-angling venue because of visiting shoals of mackerel during July, August and September. The best fishing is from its pier. Other species caught here include mullet, codling, plaice and dabs.

Baltray and **Mornington**, which face each other across Dundalk Bay and the mouth of the Boyne, also attract many anglers, especially for bass during the summer.

Coarse angling is available with pike fishing in **Drumcah** and **Cortail lakes**; and carp fishing at **Stephenstown Pond**, Knockbridge, which has facilities for the disabled.

BOAT RENTAL

Carlingford Lough Sea Angling can be contacted on the Co. Down side of the Lough. ☎ (028) 3026-4906.

For deep sea fishing, call **Deep Sea Fishing North Commons**, Carlingford, ☎ (042) 937-3239 or 932-8061; mobile 087 288-1191.

For daily fishing trips, call Tony Lynch in Clogherhead, ☎ (041) 983-3698.

LOCAL INFORMATION

For tackle, bait, state licenses, permits, and local information, contact the **Drogheda Angling Centre**, Stockwell Close. ☎ (041) 984-5442.

To fish particular rivers, you should contact the relevant body: the **Dee and Glyde Development Association**, ☎ (042) 937-2176.

For the Boyne, and Rose Hall, Barnattin and Killineer reservoirs: **Drogheda and District Anglers' Club**, ☎ (041) 983-4078.

For the River Fane and its tributaries: **Dundalk Salmon Anglers' Association**, ☎ (042) 933-5698; Dundalk Brown Trout Anglers' Association, ☎ (042) 932-8626.

For Stephenstown Pond, licenses are available from **Brodigans Foodstore** in Knockbridge village.

On Horseback

Ravensdale Lodge Equestrian and Trekking Centre is near Forest Park and the Cooley mountains, and is open all year. You can take lessons here, or go on mountain treks or cross-country. ☎/fax (042) 937-1034; info@ravensdalelodge.com; www.ravensdalelodge.com.

Racing

Races take place at **Laytown Racecourse** on Laytown Strand in September – the only beach-run horse race in Europe. ☎ (041)982-7107.

◆ Golf

Dundalk Golf Club is north of the seaside resort of Blackrock. ☎ (042) 932-1731. The **Carnbeg Golf Course** is at Kilcurry, near Dundalk. ☎ (042) 933-2518. There's also the course at the **Killin Park Golf and Country Club**, Dundalk. ☎ (042) 933-9303.

County Louth Golf Club, usually called **Baltray**, is four miles (6.4 km) northeast of Drogheda at the mouth of the River Boyne. It's an excellent links course, considered by experts to be among the top six on the island. ☎ (041) 982-2329; reservations@countylouthgolfclub.com.

Ardee Golf Club. Townparks, .6 mile (one km) north of Ardee, has an 18-hole course, along with practice and catering facilities. ☎ (041) 685-3227.

Greenore Golf Club is on the Cooley Peninsula, and has an 18-hole parkland course along the shore with lovely views across Carlingford Lough to the Mountains of Mourne. ☎ (042) 937-3212.

Seapoint Golf Club is at Termonfeckin. ☎ (041) 982-2333.

Close to Drogheda and on the coast is the **Laytown and Bettystown Golf Club**. ☎ (041) 982-7170.

◆ Where to Stay

For accommodations pricing guide, see page 51.

☆☆☆ The **Ballymascanlon House Hotel**, two miles north of Dundalk on the R173, is a Victorian mansion set in 130 acres on the Cooley Peninsula with lovely views. It has its own 18-hole parkland golf course, tennis courts and leisure center with pool, gym, and other facilities. Special golfing and other breaks are available. It's family-run and belongs to the Best Western group. $$. ☎ (042) 935-8200; fax 937-1598; info@ballymascanlon.com; www.ballymascanlon.com.

☆☆☆ The **Boyne Valley Hotel & Country Club**, Stameen, Dublin Road, Drogheda, is surrounded by 16 acres of lovely gardens and woodlands. It has a leisure center with pool, and outside there's an 18-hole pitch-and-putt course and two tennis courts, playable all year. Its **Cellar Bistro** has locally caught fish on the menu. $$. ☎ (041) 983-7737; fax 983-9188; reservations@boyne-valley-hotel.ie; www.boyne-valley-hotel.ie.

☆☆ The Bellingham Castle Hotel, Castlebellingham, off the M1 midway between Drogheda and Dundalk, is a refurbished early 18th-century castle on the River Dee. The interior combines antique décor with modern facilities. The village of Castlebellingham is also interesting, with a group of Widows' Almshouses and other cottages built by the Bellingham family. $-$$. ☎ (042) 937-2176; fax 937-2766; bellinghamcastle@eircom.net; www.bellinghamcastle.com.

Another castle you can stay in is **Smarmore Castle**, in Smarmore, between Collon and Ardee, a short distance from the N2. It's one of the oldest castles in the country, dating from 1320, and staying there is special, as there are only five spacious bedrooms. These days it's

also a leisure club with a gym, pool, steam room and other facilities, including a therapeutic and aromatherapy massage center. $. ☎ (041) 685-7167; fax 685-7650; info@smarmorecastle.com; www.smarmorecastle.com.

☆☆☆☆ The **Táin Holiday Village**, at Omeath on the Cooley Peninsula, has a hostel, a caravan and camping site, cook-for-yourself mobile homes, swimming pool, indoor and outdoor adventure grounds, tennis courts and facilities for kayaking, canoeing, archery. It also has a licensed restaurant and bar with entertainment. ☎ (042) 937-5385, fax 937-5417; www.tainadventure.net.

View Point offers motel-style accommodation in Carlingford, with absolutely spectacular views over the lough, the harbor and of the Mountains of Mourne. Take a look at the Web site and you get some idea. It's excellent value at less than $ per person, including breakfast. ☎ (042) 937-3149; www.viewpointcarlingford.com.

The **Oystercatcher Lodge and Bistro**, Market Square, Carlingford, is an attractive guesthouse offering bed and breakfast. Its seven rooms are more like mini-suites. The Bistro serves food made with the best local ingredients, including oysters farmed in the lough, crab and lobster from Dundalk Bay, and Cooley Mountain lamb. Rates (sharing, breakfast included) from $$, with lots of special break offers. ☎ (042) 937-3922; info@theoystercatcher.com.

Ghan House in Carlingford, built in 1727, is a fine example of a Georgian house. Its first-floor drawing room has a decorative ceiling of rococo plasterwork with flower garlands and medallion busts of the daughters of the original owners. The house is surrounded by castellated walls and a guards' tower. In its basement there are two underground passages, now blocked. For a break with a difference, take one of the courses at its Cookery School. ☎/fax (042) 937-3682; www.ghanhouse.com.

Beaufort House is not only a guesthouse, it's also the Carlingford Yacht Charter and Sea School Limited. Here you can charter a yacht, either bare-boat or with skipper, or learn to sail. Courses are run by proprietor Michael Caine, and start at Competent Crew, progressing to Day Skipper, Coastal Skipper and Yachtmaster Offshore. You don't have to have any experience to do the entry level Competent Crew. Beaufort House is on the shore with lovely views and guests can relax in its Chart Room. $. ☎ (042) 937-3879, 937-3878; michaelcaine@beauforthouse.net; www.beauforthouse.net.

Setanta Bed and Breakfast, 7 Castle Street, Ardee, is a lovely old Georgian townhouse, with high ceilings and wooden floors. $ for two with breakfast. ☎ (041) 685-3319; www.setantabandb.com, info@setantabandb.com.

Hostels

The **Green Door Hostel**, John Street, Drogheda, is open all year. It belongs to both the Youth Hostels Association (www.irelandyha.org) and the Independent Holiday Hostels of Ireland group (www.hostels-ireland.com). ☎ (041) 983-4422; fax 984-5624; www.greendoorhostel.com.

The **Adventure Centre and Holiday Hostel**, Carlingford, is open from mid-January to mid-December. ☎ (042) 937-3100; fax 937-3651; info@carlingfordadventure.com.

Camping & RV Parks

In addition to camping at Táin Village (see previous page), there is the ☆☆☆☆ **Gyles Quay Caravan and Camping Park**, 10 miles (16 km) from Dundalk off the road to Newry. It overlooks Dundalk Bay on the Cooley Peninsula and has access to a safe beach. There's a leisure center on site, and a licensed clubhouse. It's open April to early September. ☎ (042) 937-6262.

◆ Where to Eat

There are lots of places to eat in Co. Louth, among them the following: **PJ O'Hares**, Carlingford, is a traditional and welcoming pub that serves sandwiches and lunches at excellent value. ☎ (042) 937-3106.

Monks Expresso Bar, The Quays, Drogheda, is ideal for a relaxed snack or meal. Open every day from 8:30 am to 6 pm. ☎ (041) 984-5630.

The Buttergate Restaurant, Millmount, Drogheda, opens from 11 am to 3 pm for snacks and lunch, and from 6 to 10:30 pm for dinner. It specializes in modern Irish, European and Italian dishes. ☎ (041) 983-4759.

Rolf's Bistro on Market Street, Ardee, opens only for dinner, from Tuesday-Saturday, 6-10 pm, Sundays from 5-9 pm. It has a special

Early Bird menu from 5:30-7 pm, Tuesday-Friday. Its menu includes modern Irish and Swedish specialties. ☎ (041) 685-7949.

The Clermont Arms, on Main Street, Blackrock, the seaside village, is open daily from 4 pm, serving dinner from 6-10 pm (9 pm on Sundays). Its menu includes steaks, seafood and traditional Irish dishes. It has a paved outdoor area for use in better weather, and doesn't welcome children under 12, so diners should have a peaceful experience. ☎ (042) 932-2666.

Cube, opposite St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dundalk, is contemporary Irish, using the best local produce, and its menu includes beef, seafood and vegetarian dishes. Open for lunch Monday to Friday, noon to 3 pm; dinner Tuesday to Saturday, 7 to 11 pm. ☎ (042) 932-9898; www.cuberestaurants.ie.

County Wicklow

Known as "the Garden of Ireland," Wicklow has wonderful scenery, with mountains, wooded valleys and lakes. It is fringed on the east by golden sandy beaches. Major routes to the east and west go through two of the highest passes in the country – Sally Gap and Wicklow Gap. Among its spectacular valleys are Glenmalure, Glencree, Glenmacnass, the Glen of Immal, and the most famous of all – Glendalough.

The area is very popular with outdoor enthusiasts for the range of activities it offers – walking, cycling, shore, coarse and game angling, golf, riding, watersports. It's also the home of one of the country's most famous early Christian sites, Glendalough, and there are a number of historic gardens and houses to visit.

Heather on Mt. Wicklow

Because of its wonderful scenery, the county has been used as a location for many films over the years, including *Excalibur*, *Braveheart*, *Far and Away* and *Michael Collins*. The very successful Irish television series *Ballykissangel* was made in the pretty village of Avoca. The largest

town is Bray, the county capital is Wicklow Town, and its other main towns include Arklow and Greystones.

◆ Getting Here

Bray is 13 miles (21 km) south of Dublin City on the N11; from Cork (172 miles/277 km) take the N11-N7-N8; from Galway (151 miles/243 km) take the N11-N4-N6-N18. It's the southern terminus of the DART service.

Wicklow Town is just off the N11 south of Bray and Greystones and north of Arklow.

Bray, Greystones, Wicklow, Rathdrum and Arklow are connected to Dublin by commuter rail services, and there's also an excellent bus service.

◆ Tourist Information

Wicklow Town Tourist Office, Rialto House, Fitzwilliam Square. ☎ (0404) 69117; fax 69118; wicklowtouristoffice@eircom.net; www.eastcoastmidlands.ie. Open year-round, Monday to Friday, 9:30 am to 5:30 pm; July & August, open Monday to Saturday.

During the summer, tourist information is available at Arklow, Bray, Baltinglass, Blessington, Carnew, Glendalough/Laragh, Rathdrum, and Roundwood. Their hours vary. Call the Wicklow office for details.

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

The **Heritage Centre** in the historic gaol in Wicklow Town provides a genealogical research service. ☎ (0404) 20126; fax 69980; wfh@eircom.net.

◆ Sightseeing

Wicklow Town

Its name comes not from Irish but from Norse – *Vykinglo*, meaning Viking meadow, which gives you some idea of its early inhabitants.

A **Regatta & Festival** has been held here in late July/early August since 1878.

Wicklow Gaol, at the southern end of the town beside the courthouse, includes displays covering the 1789 Rebellion, the Great Famine, and

penal transportation to Australia. ☎ (0404) 61599; fax 61612; www.wicklowhistoricgaol.com.

Bray

Bray has been popular for generations with its safe sand-and-shingle beach a mile long. It was the first seaside resort town in the Republic from the 19th century on, when the more prosperous Dubliners came here for the summer, and its first esplanade was laid out in 1859.

The Cross at Bray Head (Deepsky)

There's a pleasant walk to **Bray Head**, which rises to almost 800 feet above the sea and offers lovely views. The town retains a charming, rather old-fashioned feeling, with its Georgian and Victorian houses, although today it's the home of many who commute daily to nearby Dublin City. It makes a great base for anyone exploring the county.

The **National Sealife Centre** on Strand Road has over 30 displays, with hundreds of different sea and freshwater creatures to inspect. Open daily from 10 am. ☎ (01) 286-6939; www.sealife.ie.

Greystones

Greystones is five miles (eight km) south of Bray, 18 miles (29 km) from Dublin, and is between the Sugar Loaf Mountains and the sea. It's a quieter resort than its neighbor Bray and, while growing rapidly with the expansion of the commuter belt, retains a charming old-world atmosphere, especially around its fishing harbor. There's both a Sailing Club and a Motor Yacht Club here for cruisers.

Arklow

Arklow is the most southerly of Wicklow's main towns, and is small but lively. Now popular for shopping and as a seaside resort, it was once a busy port. It's on the Avoca River, the N11 main road, and on the Dublin-Rosslare railway line. It was one of the first towns developed by the Vikings, and has sandy beaches on both sides. It hosts a

number of annual festivals, including the **Maritime Festival** in August with model boat racing in the river, a dog show, stalls, stands, a "Bouncy Castle" for kids, slides and a horizontal bungee, plus a soccer match and a photography exhibition, among other activities.

Its main street is attractive and there's a lovely riverside walk and a **Maritime Museum**. In 1824 the first lifeboat station in the country opened here. Its port still has a sizeable fleet of fishing boats and the town is renowned for boat building, including the Republic's sail training ship, *Asgard II*.

The Vale of Avoca

Home to the country's oldest woollen mill, the Avoca Valley in the south of the county is also one of the few places in Ireland where mining was carried out, here for gold and copper. The valley stretches from just west of Arklow, from Woodenbridge to the Meeting of the Waters, north of the picturesque village, where the Avonmore and Avonbeg join to form the River Avoca. At **Avoca Handweavers** you can see the mill, dating from 1723, and watch the weaving process. The valley was immortalized by the poet Thomas Moore in the song *Sweet Vale of Avoca*:

> *There is not in this wide world a valley so sweet*
> *As that vale in whose bosom the bright waters meet,*
> *Oh! The last rays of feeling and life must depart*
> *Ere the bloom of that valley shall fade from my heart.*

The Vale of Avoca

Glendalough

Make sure you don't leave Wicklow without visiting Glendalough. The most memorable approach to it is from the west, decending from the Wicklow Gap, 10 miles (16 km) southwest of Enniskerry. The towering peaks of the Wicklow Mountains, covered in forests, are reflected in the two lakes that give the valley its name – "the glen of two lakes." It really is a beautiful and special place.

Glendalough (Seamus Kinlan)

The **monastic settlement** here was founded in the sixth century by the hermit Saint Kevin, and flourished as a place of pilgrimage until the 16th century, when it was almost destroyed. The surviving buildings, dating from the eighth to 12th centuries, include a round tower, which is in nearly perfect condition, a cathedral, seven stone churches, and some decorated crosses. There's a center for visitors with lots of information and audio-visual shows. Regular guided tours are offered, but you'll also enjoy exploring on your own.

In summer, this is one of the busiest sites in the country. It attracts up to half a million visitors a year, so try and visit early in the morning. The Visitor Centre is open daily all year from 9:30 am to 6 pm, mid-March to mid-October; to 5:30 pm rest of year. ☎ (0404) 45325; fax 45626.

Just two miles (3.2 km) south of Blessington is **Russborough House**, built for the Earl of Milltown in 1740-50, which has beautiful furniture, tapestries, carpets and porcelain to see. The house is in Palladian style, built from local granite, and designed by Richard Castle, or Cassells, considered one of the most important architects of the time.Russborough House

It's best-known as the home of the Beit Collection of paintings, dominated by Flemish, Dutch and Spanish masterpieces, some of which

have unfortunately been stolen a couple of times, but thankfully recovered. Open May-September, 10:30-5:30 pm; April and October, Sundays and Bank Holidays only. ☎ (045) 865-239; fax 865-054.

◆ Adventures

On Foot

The ***Slí na Sláinte***, literally "the walk of health," is a signposted coastal and urban walk around Bray for 8.75 miles (14 km). It's one of a network all over the country so named, which have been established to encourage walking.

There's also a scenic cliff walk around **Bray Head to Greystones**, which is four miles (seven km) long.

The **Wicklow Mountains** are so popular with walkers that there are two annual festivals, in spring and autumn, which offer up to four guided walks a day, allowing for all levels of experience. You learn about the county and Ireland's culture, geology and wildlife. Details from Wicklow Town Tourist Office, Rialto House, Fitzwilliam Square, ☎ (0404) 69117; fax 69118, wicklowtouristoffice@eircom.net, www.ecoast-midlands.travel.ie.

Wicklow Mountain National Park, Upper Lake, Glendalough, has steep-sided valleys, mountains shaped by erosion and the Ice Age, oak woods and blanket bog. In addition to walking here, there's a series of organized events, including **bat walks** and **mining walks**, **rut walks** (deer spotting), **woodland**, and **wildflower walks**. Details available from Park Information, ☎ (0404) 45656.

In 1981, **The Wicklow Way** was the first signposted long-distance route to be opened in Ireland. It's 82 miles (132 km) long, running from Marlay Park in Co. Dublin, climbing into the Dublin Mountains and then from glen to glen through the mountains in Wicklow, ending in Clonegal, Co. Carlow. It takes five or six days to walk it all, but you can just do sections; it's clearly marked with wooden posts topped by yellow arrows at each junction. See www.wicklowway.com for details. Some sections are along tracks, others boggy, and a lot of it is at a height of over 1,600 feet (500 m), so you get fantastic views.

St. Kevin's Way is another waymarked route. It runs from Hollywood in West Wicklow to Glendalough, following the path taken by pil-

grims. A secondary route brings you from Valleymount to join the main Way at Ballinagree Bridge on the R756.

The **Avoca Valley** is another interesting area for walking, both on forest trails and through the old mine workings. The **Mottee Walk** begins at The Meetings pub beside the Meeting of the Waters and is five miles (eight km) long, taking you through mature mixed woodland. Approaching the Mottee Stone you see **Castle Howard**, a fortified house belonging to the mine owners in the 17th century. In the heather are old mine workings and the ruins of walls and cottages, evidence of how densely populated the area was in previous times.

THE MOTTEE STONE

The **Mottee Stone** may take its name from the French *moitié*, meaning half, as it's halfway between Dublin and Wexford. It's a huge granite boulder, different from the surrounding rock, and there's a legend that Fionn MacCool threw it from the top of Lugnaquilla Mountain, Wicklow's highest peak. However, geologists say it's an erratic boulder left behind by retreating ice.

Coillte, the State Forestry Service, has a Forest Park and 15 other sites around the county. Among the latter is the **Devil's Glen**, 2½ miles (four km) west of Ashford. Walks here go through a spectacular gorge to a waterfall.

It's also home to **Sculpture in Woodland**, a collection of over 16 contemporary sculptures by Irish and international artists. You can walk in the woods, as well as explore the artwork. There are two detailed routes (ranging from 30 minutes to two hours). Take a look at the Web site for a map and further details: www.sculptureinwoodland.ie or ☎ (01) 201-1111; sculpinfo@coillte.ie.

Avondale House

The Forest Park surrounds **Avondale House** at Rathdrum, which was the birthplace and home of Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-91). He was leader of the Irish Parliamentary

Party in the late 19th century. It's now a museum in his memory, with tours and audio-visual presentations.

The estate covers over 500 acres and has miles of signposted forest trails with marvelous views and lots of wildlife, including 90 different species of birds. There's a restaurant/tea room and gift shop. Open daily March 17-October 31, 11 am-6 pm. ☎/fax (0404) 46111; www.coillte.ie.

THE GARDENS OF IRELAND

Wicklow, home to some of the Republic's finest heritage gardens, has an annual **Gardens Festival** from the beginning of May to the end of July. Among the best is **Killruddery**, near Bray, a garden designed in the French formal style of the 17th century, with terraces, twin canals and sylvan theater. ☎/fax (01) 286-2777. The others are:

The **Powerscourt Estate** at Enniskerry, ☎ (01) 204-6000; fax 204-6900; gardens@powerscourt.ie; www.powerscourt.ie. The waterfall, the highest in the country, is a couple of miles from Enniskerry and well worth the trip.

Mount Usher Gardens near Ashford, ☎ (0404) 40205; mount-_usher_gardens@indigo.ie; www.mount-usher-gardens.com.

Russborough House, already mentioned, **Avondale House** and **Forest Park**, are also worth a visit.

WALKING VACATIONS

Footfalls Walking Holidays offers guided and self-guided walking and hiking vacations in Wicklow and elsewhere. They also rent bikes. Trooperstown, Roundwood; ☎ (0404) 45152; info@walkinghikingireland.com; www.walkinghikingireland.com.

You can also stay at the family-run ☆☆☆ **Lawless Hotel and Holiday Village**, Aughrim, and go walking nearby. The owners, the O'Tooles, publish a booklet of rambles near their beautiful village, written by expert Tom Phelan. The routes vary in length and difficulty. See *Where to Stay*, page 129.

On Wheels

CYCLING

With lots of minor roads and varied scenery, Wicklow is suitable for cycling, although there are lots of steep climbs and narrow winding roads. Among the places you can rent bikes or have them repaired are:

Johnny Price's Garage, Main Street, Roundwood. ☎ (01) 281-8128

Bray Cycle Centre, Main Street, Bray. ☎ (01) 286-3357

T. McGrath, Rathdrum. ☎ (0404) 46172

Hillcrest Hire, Blessington. ☎ (045) 865-066

ALL-TERRAIN

At Newtownmountkennedy, a village just off the N11 between Bray and Ashford, you can enjoy driving all-terrain vehicles around a cross-country course, at the **Hill Top Quad and Sporting Club**. ☎ (01) 281-8025.

SCENIC DRIVES

Signposted drives include the **Wicklow Coast Drive**, the **Glencree Drive**, the **Wicklow Gap Drive** and the **Liffey Valley Drive**.

The **Lake Drive** starts in Blessington and takes you around the lakes and the Poulaphuca Reservoir.

BUS TOURS

Guided tours by coach include:

The Wicklow Tour, run by Irish City Tours, 33-34 Bachelor's Walk, Dublin. ☎ (01) 872-9010; linda@irishcitytours.com or www.irishcitytours.com.

A Taste of Wicklow, ☎ 1-800-609-606 or (01) 834-0941. Book on-line at www.daytoursunplugged.ie.

Dublin Bus, ☎ (01) 873-4222, www.dublinbus.ie, also offers a choice of tours.

◆ On Water

Try something different – such as **hovercrafting** at Moneystown Farm, Arklow. ☎ (0402) 32259; mland@eircom.net.

You can swim or take part in other watersports at many locations along the coast.

Brittas Bay, Greystones, Wicklow and Arklow are ideal for **sailing, wind surfing** and **boating**. From Greystones to Wicklow, the shingle and stone beach extends for 19 miles (31 km), and is popular, not just for swimming, but also for walking and shore angling. From the N11 coast road, you can gain access to beaches at Kilcoole, Newcastle and Killoughter.

South of Wicklow Town there's a choice of **beaches** – Silver Strand, Maghermore, Jack's Hole and Brittas Bay, the latter a three-mile-long beach which has received the **Blue Flag Award** (see page 63) for a number of years. The beach at Bray and the sandy beaches on either side of Arklow are also safe for swimming.

In the western part of the county, the **Blessington Adventure Centre**, just south of the village on the shore of the reservoir, offers a number of land- and water-based activities, including abseiling, archery, clay pigeon shooting, tennis, orienteering, canoeing, sailing and windsurfing. You can also take a lake tour on the MV *Blessington*. There's a restaurant on site as well. ☎ (045) 865-092; fax 865-024.

Fishing

Wicklow offers a range of rivers, lakes and the sea, so is ideal for anyone interested in fishing.

Bray is a popular boat and shore fishing location. Self-drive or skippered small boats are based in the harbor and can be hired from the Esplanade Hotel. ☎ (01) 286-2056.

At **Greystones**, North Beach is renowned for its shore fishing, and at its harbor there's pier fishing, and small boats head out from there for bottom fishing.

Recommended locations include the rivers Dargle, Vartry, Avonmore, Aughrim, Derry, Slaney, the Upper Liffey, the Roundwood and Blessington Lakes.

The **Blessington Lakes** are good for brown trout, pike, perch, and roach, and the **Roundwood Lakes** for brown trout.

Angling for All is the National Disabled Angling Facility (NDAF), and is a four-acre lake fully stocked with trout and surrounded by an attractive wildlife area. It's in the lovely village of Aughrim, next to the welcoming Lawless Hotel. It's open 8 am-8 pm in summer, 9 am-5 pm in winter. ☎ (0402) 36552; aughrinit@eircom.net.

Annamoe, between Roundwood and Laragh on the road to Glendalough, has a trout fishery on the banks of the Avonmore River. There's a four-acre lake for fly-fishing, rod hire and bait available. Open daily, 10 am to dusk. ☎/fax (0404) 45470; nally@gofree.indigo.ie; www.annamoetroutfishery.com.

There's a free map-brochure available called A Guide to Angling in Co. Wicklow. The Trout and Salmon Rivers of Ireland: An Angler's Guide by Peter O'Reilly is well worth reading, wherever you are visiting.

◆ On Horseback

At these equestrian centers you can take lessons or go trekking or trail riding; you can also explore the county by horse-drawn caravan.

Brennanstown Riding School is in the Hollybrook Demesne, Kilmacanogue, near Bray, and caters to all levels of experience. It has both indoor and outdoor facilities. ☎ (01) 286-3778; info@brennanstowrs.ie.

Calliaghstown Riding Centre, Rathcoole, also has all-weather facilities and offers lessons and riding vacations. The **Wicklow Trail Ride** starts here, finishing at Glendalough. ☎ (01) 458-8322; www.calliaghstownridingcentre.com; info@calliaghstownridingcentre.com.

Broomfield Equestrian Centre, Tinahely, can arrange lessons and organizes hacks across 500 acres of beautiful countryside. ☎ (0402) 38117.

Riding Vacations

With **Clissmann Horse Drawn Caravans** you can travel around in a covered wagon that sleeps four. ☎ (0404) 48188; mary@clissmann.com.

The Devil's Glen Holiday and Equestrian Centre, Ashford, has 20 luxury cottages for rent. ☎ (0404) 40637; info@devilsglen.ie; www.devilsglen.ie.

Macreddin Stables, Aughrim, is attached to the Brooklodge Hotel, between Lugnaquilla and the Cushawn Mountains, and welcomes riders at all levels. ☎ (0402) 36444; brooklodge@macreddin.ie; www.brooklodge.com.

◆ Golf

There are over 20 courses to choose from, including seaside and traditional links, most of them founded in the last 15 years. Many hotels also offer golfing vacations. There's an excellent map-brochure available from tourist offices with details of the courses, as well as a list of pitch-and-putt and driving ranges.

HI-TECH GOLF

You can play a round at a choice of 20 courses on the Golf Simulator at **Moneylands Farm**, signposted on the south side of Arklow. It also has a virtual driving range and a video teaching system. Cook-for-yourself and bed and breakfast accommodation available. ☎ (0402) 32259; fax 32438; mland@eircom.

Golf Courses

Bray Golf Club nestles under Bray Head on Ravenswell Road. It is the oldest course in the county, founded in 1897. ☎ (01) 286-2484.

Bray Golf Club

Baltinglass Golf Club is just outside town on the Dublin road, with wonderful mountain views. ☎ (059) 648-1350; fax 648-2842.

The **Djouce Mountain Golf Club** is less than two miles off the N11 at the northern tip of the Vartry Reservoir, north of Roundwood. ☎ (01) 281-8585.

Southwest of there is the **Roundwood Golf Club**, at Newtown-mountkennedy. ☎ (01) 281-8488; fax 284-3642.

Kilcoole Golf Club has a nine-hole course. ☎ (01) 287-2066; fax 287-1803; adminkg@eircom.net; www.kilcoolegolfclub.com.

Druid's Glen hosted the Irish Open for four years in succession in the late 1990s, and was voted European Golf Course of the Year. ☎ (01) 287-3600; fax 287-3699; info@druidsglen.ie; www.druidsglen.ie.

The **Old Conna Golf Club** on Ferndale Road is less than two miles from Bray. ☎ (01) 282-6055; www.oldconna.com.

The **Powerscourt Golf Club** is in the grounds of the magnificent estate, close to the picturesque village of Enniskerry, and just off the N11, southwest of Bray. ☎ (01) 204-6033; golfclub@powerscourt.ie; www.powerscourt.ie.

Within walking distance of Greystones is the **Charlesland Golf and Country Club**, which can also be approached from the N11 through Delgany. It's also a hotel with 12 rooms. ☎ (01) 287-4350; fax 287-4360; teetimes@charlesland.com; www.charlesland.com.

One of the older courses, founded in 1908, is the **Delgany Golf Club**. ☎ (01) 282-6055; robbiej@eircom.net.

West of Delgany is the **Glen of the Downs Golf Club**. ☎ (01) 287-6240; info@glenofthedowns.com; www.glenofthedowns.com.

Over in the west of the county is the **Boystown Golf Club** at Blessington. ☎ (045) 867-146.

The **Woodenbridge Golf Club** is in the south of the county, west of Arklow in the lovely Vale of Avoca. ☎ (0402) 35202; fax 35754; wgc@eircom.net; www.globalgolf.com.

◆ Tennis

There are several tennis clubs open to visitors; the larger ones are floodlit so can be played after dark.

- ***Arklow Lawn Tennis Club**. ☎ (0402) 33330*
- ***Blessington Adventure Centre**. ☎ (045) 865092*
- ***County Wicklow Lawn Tennis Club**, Bray. ☎ (01) 287-6505*
- ***Sports & Leisure Centre**, Arklow. ☎ (0402) 23328*
- ***Greystones Lawn Tennis Club**. ☎ (01) 287-6505*
- ***Wicklow Lawn Tennis Club**. ☎ (0404) 41647*
- *At the **Arklow Sports and Leisure Centre** there are indoor squash and tennis courts. ☎ (0402) 23328.*

◆ Where to Stay & Eat

For accommodations pricing guide, see page 51.

Hotels & Guest Houses

Wicklow Light

The 18th-century **Wicklow Head Lighthouse** has been restored by the Irish Landmark Trust and can be rented. It includes a kitchen. ☎ (01) 670-4733; www.rivervalleypark.com; info@rivervalleypark.com.

☆☆☆☆ **Rathsallagh House Golf and Country Club**, Dunlavin, is a large Grade A country house with its own 18-hole course and a Golf Academy. It is surrounded by over 500 acres of wonderful grounds. Converted from Queen Anne-style stables back in 1798, it is family-run and welcoming and offers lots of activities, including tennis in a walled garden, croquet, snooker, clay pigeon shooting and archery. It has an indoor pool and sauna; fishing, horse riding and walking can be arranged. Cuisine is country-house cooking at its best, made with their own vegetables, game in season, and locally caught fish. Member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World and Ireland's Blue Book (see page 53). From $$$, with special breaks available. ☎ (045) 403-112; fax 403-343; info@rathsallagh.com; www.rathsallagh.com.

☆☆☆ **Lawless Hotel**, established in 1787, is on the banks of the River Aughrim in an absolutely lovely setting, surrounded by mountains and forests. You can stay in the hotel or in the recently built vacation village next to it. Guests can fish for brown trout in the man-made angling park next door. They serve delicious food in the bar and restaurant, including the best breakfast porridge I've ever tasted, served with honey and hazelnuts. The bar is full of fishermen and walkers, so you can exchange advice, and the staff are friendly and efficient. It's a member of the Irish Country Hotels group. Special breaks offered. Rates from $$.

The Holiday Village is a group of luxury houses next to the hotel. They are attractive and comfortable, sleep five, have open fireplaces

as well as heating, and you can cook for yourself or eat at hotel if you want. Available for weekends or by the week; great value from about €650 per week in high season. Member of Irish Country Hotels and Village Inn Hotel groups. Toll-free from US ☎ 1-800-44-UTELL; (0402) 36146; fax 36384; www.lawlesshotel.com; reservations@lawlesshotel.com.

☆☆☆ **Hunter's Hotel**, in Rathnew, is in one of the oldest coaching inns in the country, dating from c. 1700. Run by the fifth generation of the Gellettie family, it has a great reputation for its welcome and its good food. There are 16 rooms, furnished with antiques, and it's on the bank of the Vartry River with lovely gardens. The hotel belongs to the Irish Country Houses & Restaurants Association and Ireland's Blue Book (see page 53). Rates from $$. Open to non-residents for lunch, afternoon tea and dinner. ☎ (0404) 40106; fax 40338; reception@hunters.ie; www.hunters.ie.

If you need a bit of pampering, then **Powerscourt Springs Health Farm** is where to go. Treatments include body wraps, body polishes, ciliate treatments, body detoxing, *Ki* massage, reflexology, massages and facials. There's a pool, a Tranquillity Room and, in case you thought you'd be expected to survive on carrot juice, you're wrong – the food is delicious. The Health Farm is in lovely quiet rural surroundings, where you can go for walks, near Enniskerry, and offers short breaks. ☎ (01) 276-1000; fax 276-1626; info@powerscourtsprings.ie; www.powerscourtsprings.ie.

Camping & RV Parks

These and others are listed at www.camping-ireland.ie/wicklow. ☆☆☆☆ **River Valley Camping and Caravanning Park**, ☎ (0404) 41647, www.rivervalleypark.com, info@rivervalleypark.com.

☆☆☆☆ **Roundwood Caravan and Camping Park**, ☎ (01) 281-8163; fax 281-8196; info@dublinwicklowcamping.com.

☆☆☆ **Moat Farm Park**, ☎/fax (045) 404-727; moatfarm@ireland.com.

☆☆ **Avonmore Riverside Park**, ☎ (0404) 46080; info@avonmoreriverside.com.

Hostels

There's a choice of four hostels run by the Youth Hostel Association: **Glendaloch**; **Knockree**, near Enniskerry; **Tiglin**, near Ashford; and **Glenmalure**, near Greenane.

The latter, basic and gas-lit, is where JM Synge wrote his play *The Shadow of the Glen*, and where Iseult Gonne, daughter of Maud (loved by Yeats), lived with her husband, the writer Francis Stuart. ☎ (01) 830-4555; mailbox@anoige.ie; www.irelandyha.org.

There are also two members of the Independent Holiday Hostels of Ireland in Wicklow Bay, open February to November. ☎ (0404) 69213; infor@wicklowbayhostel.com.

The **Old Presbytery**, Rathdrum is open all year. ☎ (0404) 46930; theoldpres@eircom.net.

County Meath

County Meath is one of the most fertile areas in the country, lying on a limestone plain watered by the rivers Boyne and Blackwater and their tributaries. A small part of the county is on the coast, with sandy beaches at Laytown and Bettystown.

It's a great destination for anyone interested in fishing and is also a center for horse breeding and racing, with plenty of equestrian facilities for visitors. Despite being close to Dublin, it is a rural and quiet county, with lovely countryside for walking.

Everywhere you go there's evidence of the area's importance, with a variety of monuments, castles, wooded demesnes, and historic gardens. It's known as the Royal County because it was here on the **Hill of Tara** that the High Kings lived in the 2nd century AD.

Hill of Tara

In the **Loughcrew Hills** near Oldcastle there are **megalithic tombs**. The earliest inhabitants built great stone burial places 5,000 years ago at **Brú na Bóinne** (the palace or mansion of the Boyne), now considered one of the world's most important archaeological landscapes. In the fifth century, St. Patrick lit the Paschal Fire on the summit of the Hill of Slane. In 1690, the Battle of the Boyne took place near Oldbridge, when William's forces defeated the Jacobites, an event that changed Irish history.

Among the many sites worth visiting is the magnificent Anglo-Norman **castle at Trim** and the ruins of the **monastery at Kells**, where

the monks created the illuminated manuscript called *The Book of Kells* (which you can see at Trinity College, Dublin).

The county capital and largest town is **Navan**, and other main towns include Ashbourne, Athboy, Dunshaughlin, Kells, Slane and Trim.

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

There's a genealogical service at the **Meath Heritage Centre**, Trim. ☎ (046) 943-6633; meathhc@iol.ie.

◆ Getting Here

County Meath is reached by the N1 from Dublin (28 miles/45 km); the connecting routes N51-N2-N52-N1-A1-N1 from Belfast (85 miles/137 km); and routes N52-N6-N18 from Galway (124 miles/200 km).

◆ Getting Around

Bus Station, ☎ (041) 983-5023.

◆ Tourist Information

Fáilte Ireland Tourist Offices are at Castle Street, Trim, open May to September, Monday to Saturday, ☎ (046) 943-7227.

Meath Tourism Ltd., Civic Offices, Killegland Street, Ashbourne, open Monday to Friday, 9:30am to 5pm, ☎ (01) 835-8022; info@meathtourism.ie www.meathtourism.ie.

There are also Tourist Information points at:

- Kells Heritage Centre, Headfort Place, Kells. ☎ (046) 924-7840
- The County Library, Railway Street, Navan
- McDonnell/Connolly Crafts, Newgrange Mall, Slane
- Maguires, Hill of Tara
- Loughcrew Historic Gardens, Loughcrew, Oldcastle. ☎ (049) 854-1922

◆ Sightseeing

Navan

Navan is right in the middle of the county, where the Rivers Boyne and Blackwater meet, with plenty of shops, restaurants, and pubs. It's a welcoming place for a break when exploring or as a base for a vacation. The town dates back to Norman times and later was walled to defend the outer boundary of the Pale (see page 11) against frequent attacks, especially during the 15th and 16th centuries, from the O'Neills and other Ulster clans.

It became prosperous with the opening of a canal to Drogheda, and with trades such as milling, distilling and paper-making. Europe's largest zinc mine is nearby and is a major employer today.

There are lots of small shops, including many selling gifts, an exclusive shoe boutique, **Lamont Shoes** on Kennedy Road, with **Bookwise Booksellers** nearby. The shopping center has 60 retail units offering everything from fashion to groceries. There are plenty of parking spaces, including a multistory; pay in the shopping center before returning to your car.

ST. PATRICK

Ireland's symbol, the shamrock, is associated with St. Patrick, who is reputed to have used it to demonstrate the Trinity – the three persons in one God.

There are different versions of the early life of St. Patrick, but all agree that he brought Christianity to the country in the 5th century. The Hill of Slane (see below) is where he is said to have lit the first Paschal, or Easter fire – which coincided with the great festival of the Druids held at Tara. His action caused great consternation, because no fires were allowed to be lit until after the one at the royal residence. Patrick was brought before the High King Laoghaire, but succeeded in pacifying him, and the new religion took root.

The impressive ruins of **Bective Abbey** are just over four miles (6.4 km) south of Navan, off the main Trim road. A Cistercian monastery, it was founded in 1147 and fortified in the 15th century. Today, the fortress aspect of the abbey prevails, and it has more the feel of a castle than of a monastery. Nearby is the **Hill of Tara**, six miles (12 km) south of Navan, off the N3, famous in myth and in history as Ireland's

capital in pre-Christian times. There's a stunning view of the countryside from the summit. The Visitor Centre, with an audio-visual show, is in the former church of St. Patrick, and is run by the Heritage Service. Open mid June to mid September, 9:30 am to 6:30 am; shorter hours in May and October. ☎ (046) 902-5903.

Slane

Slane Castle

Slane is a good example of an estate village, with some fine Georgian houses. Just outside the village, **Slane Castle** is the home of Lord Henry Mountcharles, who hosts rock concerts in its grounds every August, and is not open to the public. Some of the biggest names worldwide have played here, including Bruce Springsteen and The Rolling Stones; details are at www.slanecastle.ie. Take the turn on your right opposite the castle for the **Hill of Slane**.

A mile from Slane on the N51 to Drogheda is the birthplace of the poet **Francis Ledwidge**, killed in World War I. The cottage is now a museum dedicated to him and a War Memorial Centre. Open daily. ☎ (041) 982-4544.

At Drogheda turn right then left and follow the mouth of the Boyne. Look for signs for the site of the **Battle of the Boyne**, admission free, open April-Sept daily, 10 am-6 pm. ☎ (041) 988-4343.

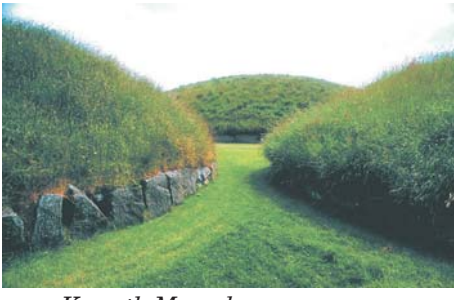
Take in the **beaches** of Mornington, Bettystown, Laytown. It was here that the **Tara Brooch** was discovered in 1850 near the Hill of Tara (traditionally known as the seat of the High Kings). The brooch, dating from the eighth century, is made of silver and covered with precious stones and is now in the National Museum in Dublin. At **Mornington**, look at the lighthouse beacon, dating from Elizabethan times, and at the round tower. and then move inland to Julianstown, Duleek, and Donore, where you visit Newgrange and Knowth.

Near Laytown is Sonairte, the **National Ecology Centre**, where you can visit an organic garden, learn about alternative sources of energy, or follow a nature trail. There's also a coffee shop.

Between Julianstown and Duleek you pass through wooded countryside, and there's a ninth-century high cross (see page 106) in Duleek. From the top of the hill at Donore you get a wonderful view of the Boyne and there's also a 15th-century castle.

Newgrange

The Visitor Centre for Newgrange and Knowth, the **Brú Na Bóinne** area, is at Donore. UNESCO has designated this a World Heritage Site, one of three in Ireland. Access is through the attractive center, cleverly hidden in the landscape, and housing a very interesting display, a restaurant and tourist office. As it's such a popular site, you are given a timed ticket for your guided tour.



Knowth Mounds (Meath Tourism)

Newgrange is the best-known passage tomb in the country, although the **Knowth Mounds** are larger. Newgrange was built around 3200 BC, discovered in 1699, and excavated and restored in the 1960s and '70s. It's covered by a mound with a quartz and granite façade and dominates the landscape, yet inside it's very small, so few visitors can enter it at a time. You walk along a narrow passageway to a cross-shaped chamber. Its most interesting feature is the Roof Box, a small opening above the doorway, precisely aligned to catch the rays of the rising sun on the morning of the winter solstice, December 21, when the chamber is lit up for about 20 minutes. People book their visits years in advance for this experience.

Newgrange is open daily all year, Knowth from early April to end of October. ☎ (041) 988-0300; fax 982-3072. As you travel back along the N51 towards Navan, remember to take care and allow extra time

when crossing the Boyne at Slane; as you approach the bridge from a steep hill, it's very dangerous and special controls are in place.

Kells

Book of Kells

Kells is on the N3 northwest of Navan. It's another Heritage Town and was a royal residence before St. Columcille founded a monastic settlement here in 550. His monks fled from the Scottish island of Iona to Kells in 806 to avoid Viking raids, and they were the creators of the *Book of Kells*, now in Trinity College, Dublin. The **High Cross of Kells** is outside the **Heritage Centre**, housed in the former courthouse on the Dublin side of town. ☎ (046) 924-7840.

Trim

The Heritage Town of Trim, on the R154, south of Athboy and Kells, is one of the prettiest in the country. It has a signposted walking trail you can follow or else go as you will and soak up the atmosphere. It has a friendly **Visitor Centre** with a multi-media exhibition, worth seeing before you explore further, and a small craft shop. Open year-round, daily except Thursdays, 10 am to 5 pm; Sundays, noon to 5:30 pm. ☎ (046) 943-7227; trimvisitorcenter@eircom.net.

Trim Castle is the largest Anglo-Norman castle in Ireland, built by Hugh de Lacey in the 13th century, and most impressive. No wonder the makers of the feature film *Braveheart* used it as a location, and that it's a busy site. In medieval times this was the very edge of the Pale (see page 11). Open year-round. Easter to the end of October,

daily, 10 am to 6 pm; weekends only in winter. ☎ (046) 943-8619; fax 943-8618.

The **National Ploughing Championships** take place in late September at Ballinabrackey, eight miles (12 km) from Enfield, 13 miles (21 km) from Trim. They're great fun, with lots to see. Contact Meath Tourism, ☎ (046) 907-7273, for details.

PRETEND YOU'RE IRISH

You can pretend you're Irish for a day at the **Causey Farm**, just off the Kells-to-Athboy road. The Murtaghs have been farming here for more than 1,000 years and these days focus on sheep, cattle and Connemara ponies. Visitors try turf-cutting, working with a sheep dog, milking a cow, making brown bread, weaving a rope, Irish dancing, speaking a bit of Irish, playing a bodhrán. It's great fun. Open on Saturdays from 2 to 8 pm. The fee includes tea and scones at the beginning and a four-course traditional meal before you leave. They'll even pick you up from the Dublin-Kells bus stop. ☎ (046) 943-4135; www.causeyexperience.com; info@causeyexperience.com.

A walking trail around Kells takes you to sites including **St. Columcille's House**, an **oratory** dating from the 10th century, **St. Columb's Church and High Crosses**, and to **Kells Round Tower**. There's an annual **Heritage Festival** here in late June/early July.

While in Kells, visit the **Courtyard Craft Centre**, just outside the town. It has a huge variety of items, many the work of local artists, which make ideal gifts. There's an outdoor patio, colorful gardens, a coffee shop with open fire, plus lots of free parking. Open Tuesday-Saturday, 10 am-6 pm, March to end November, Sundays only in December. ☎ (046) 924-0346.

THE MEATH GAELTACHT

In 1935-37, 41 families moved from the Irish-speaking area (or *Gaeltacht*) of Connemara to Ráth Cairn, near Athboy, under a State-sponsored scheme. Now Co. Meath has its own *Gaeltacht*, the only one in the country which is inland. There's a program of classes and cultural events there all year, and in July and August you can stay in local homes. ☎ (046) 943-2067; fax 943-2381; rathcairn@eircom.net.

◆ Adventures

On Foot

Meath is a great county for walkers with its quiet roads and attractive landscape. One suggestion is to walk from **Kells to Oldcastle** through Loughcrew and on to **Castlekiernan**. There are forest parks at Lough Sheelin, Lough Bracken, and at Mullameen, five miles (eight km) from Oldcastle. From Navan to Slane, there's the five-mile **Boyne Valley Towpath**, which follows the banks of the river, parallel with the old canal, passing through beautiful scenery as you go.

If you prefer to have someone else look after arrangements, **Kelltic Walking Holidays**, based in Kells, will do that. They organize tailor-made itineraries in the county and farther afield. ☎/fax (046) 924-9672; kelltic@eircom.net.

THE GARDENS OF MEATH

For a free leaflet describing Meath's wonderful gardens, contact Meath Tourism at ☎ (046) 907-7273; fax 907-6025; info@meathtourism.ie; www.meathtourism.ie.

- ***Butterstream Gardens**, Trim, ☎ (046) 943-6017*
- ***Grove Gardens and Tropical Bird Sanctuary**, Kells, ☎ (046) 943-4276*
- ***Lakeview Gardens**, Mullagh, Kells, ☎ (046) 924-2480*
- ***Loughcrew Historic Gardens**, Oldcastle, ☎ (049) 854-1922*
- ***Ballinlough Castle Gardens**, Clonmellon, ☎ (046) 943-3135*
- ***Larchill Arcadian Gardens**, Kilcock, ☎ (01) 628-7354*
- ***Hamwood House**, Dunboyne, ☎ (01) 825-5210*

On Water

You can hire boats to cruise the Royal Canal through Meath from **Leisureway Holidays**. ☎/fax (01) 822-5034; info@leisureways.com; www.leisureways.com.

In previous times, the boat called a Boyne currach or coracle was used by fishermen and for transport and was unique to that river. It was almost circular, made with a framework of ash or hazel rods covered with cowhide. There's one on display in the Millmount Museum, Drogheda.

SWIMMING

There are indoor pools at Leisure Link in Navan, ☎ (046) 907-9950, www.e-navan.com/leisurelink; at Trim, ☎ (046) 943-1140; and at Kells, ☎ (046) 924-0551.

FISHING

The **River Boyne**, which, with its tributaries, drains most of the county, is one of Ireland's main brown trout waters, with good stocks that are well dispersed. It also has a run of sea trout, spring salmon and grilse. Anglers should get advice from local angling clubs or from the Eastern Regional Fisheries Board, which publishes a number of leaflets and guides. Contact David Byrne, the Angling Marketing Co-ordinator at the **Navan Tourist Information Centre**. ☎ (046) 907-3375; dbyrne@fishingireland.net; www.fishingireland.net.

Sea angling is popular at the **mouth of the Boyne** around Morningtown, as well as fishing from that beach, and from Bettystown and Laytown.

Among other locations are the 20 lakes around the village of **Drumconrath** in the northern part of the county, which has become a center for coarse angling. The best known include **Moynalty**, **Capragh** and **Ballyhoe**, noted for bream, with rudd, tench and pike also available.

Part of **Lough Sheelin** is in Co. Meath and is famous for its brown trout fishery. Boats can be rented here.

FOR LICENSES, PERMITS, INFORMATION, TACKLE & BAIT

- ***Anglers World**, Angling Centre, Canon Row, Navan. ☎/fax (046) 907-1866; anglersworld@hotmail.com*
- ***The Flying Sportsman**, Carrick Road, Kells. ☎ (046) 924-0205*
- *You can buy permits for the **River Blackwater**, brown trout fishery and spring salmon, looked after by the Navan and District Angling Club, from **Clarke's Sports Den**, Trimgate Street, Navan. ☎ (046) 902-1130.*

The Royal Canal passes through a short stretch of the county near the village of Enfield in the south, and crosses the Boyne near Long-

wood, via an aqueduct with three arches, and is a good coarse fishing location.

At Dunshaughlin, the **Rathbeggan Lakes** offer a day-ticket fishery with fly and coarse fishing on five lakes. ☎ (01) 824-0197; fax 824-0196; rathbegganlakes@clubi.ie; www.rathbegganlakes.com.

On Wheels

The county is a perfect destination for cyclists, with most of its roads quiet. Meath Tourism publishes a guide called *Cycling Holidays in Louth and Meath*, which includes suggested routes. Among them is one that is just over 100 miles (161 km), divided into four stages. Stage 1 starts in Navan and takes you through Bective, Tara, Batterstown, and on to Dunboyne. Stage 2 goes from there to Maynooth, Kilcock, Summerhill, to Trim. Stage 3 to Rathcairn, Athboy, Crossakeel, to Oldcastle. Stage 4 goes from there to Virginia in neighboring Cavan, back to Kells, ending in Navan.

ORGANIZED CYCLING VACATIONS

Easy Riders, based in Clonee, is one company offering vacations by bike in Meath and Cavan. ☎ (01) 825-5484.

On Horseback

There are equestrian facilities all over the county, with some also offering vacations, among them the following.

Bachelors Lodge Equestrian Centre, Kells Road, Navan, offers lessons, treks and residential riding vacations. ☎ (046) 902-1736; lowryfam@eircom.net.

The **Kells Equestrian Centre** has indoor and outdoor arenas. ☎ (046) 924-6998; info@meathtourism.ie.

Mackens/Rafeehan Stud, Kells, organizes riding vacations tailored to the individual. Eddie Macken was one of Ireland's best showjumpers ever. ☎ (046) 924-0246; susanmacken@hotmail.com; www.eddiemacken.com.

☆☆☆☆ **Broadmeadows Equestrian Centre**, Ashbourne, is a guesthouse on 100 acres with riding facilities. ☎ (01) 835-2823; fax 835-2819; info@equestrianireland.com; www.irelandequestrianireland.com.

Horseracing

There's National Hunt and flat racing at **Fairyhouse**, Ratoath, home of the Grand National, which takes place at Easter. ☎ (01) 825-6167.

Proudstown Park, Navan, with its uphill finish, is where the famous Arkle won his first race. ☎ (046) 902-1350.

Meetings have been held at **Bellewstown** for an amazing 300 years. ☎ (041) 984-2111, www.bellewstownraces.ie.

◆ Golf

Meath Tourism publishes a free brochure with details of all 11 courses, and lists of pitch 'n putt facilities. They all welcome visitors, but do phone in advance to check hours.

- ***Ashbourne Golf Club**. ☎ (01) 835-2005*
- ***The Black Bush Club**, Dunshaughlin, is near Fairyhouse Racecourse. ☎ (01) 825-0793; golf@blackbush.iol.ie.*
- *The **County Meath Club** is at Trim. ☎ (046) 943-1463*
- *The **Glebe Club** is a mile from Trim. ☎ (046) 943-1926*
- *The **Headfort Club** is on Navan Road, Kells, and has two 18-hole courses. ☎ (046) 924-0146*
- *The **Kilcock Club** is just two miles (3.2 km) off the M4. ☎ (01) 628-7283*
- ***The Laytown and Bettystown Golf Club** has a traditional links course. ☎ (041) 982-7170, fax 982-8506, www.landb.ie.*
- ***Moor-Park Golf Course** is four miles (6.4 km) from Navan on one of the highest areas in the county at Mooretown. ☎ (046) 902-7181.*
- ***Navan Golf Club** is on the lands of the Racecourse a mile from the town. ☎ (046) 902-1350.*
- *The **Royal Tara Golf Club** is right in the middle of the county off the N3 near the Hill of Tara. ☎ (046) 902-5508.*
- *The **South Meath Club** is a mile from Trim and has a nine-hole course. ☎ (046) 943-1471.*

FAMOUS MEATH PEOPLE

Duke of Wellington
(Portrait by Goya)

The **Duke of Wellington**, who defeated Napoleon at Waterloo and went on to become Prime Minister of England in 1828, spent most of his youth in Meath. North of Summerhill you can see the remains of Dangan Castle, his family home. Born Arthur Wellesley in 1769 just outside Trim, where he was educated, he later represented the town in Parliament.

Sir Richard Johnson, who became an Indian trader in what was then the Mohawk Valley and is now New York State, was born in Meath in 1715, and his family emigrated to America in 1737. Because of his fairness and hard work, he was called "the benevolent dictator" by the Indians. He died in 1774.

James Connell, who wrote the words of *The Red Flag*, the Socialist anthem, was born in Kilskyre, Crossakeel, in 1850. He was a Fenian and a member of the Land League. His career was varied – from laborer to journalist and self-taught lawyer. He died in London in 1929.

◆ Where to Stay & Eat

ACCOMMODATIONS

$ . . . . . under $60
$$. $61-120
$$$. $121-182
$$$$. $183-243
$$$$$. . . . . over $244

Look for restaurants belonging to the **Meath Good Food Circle**, as they've been independently assessed for their menu, food, service, facilities and wine list.

☆☆ **The Conyngham Arms House Hotel**, Slane, is small, with only 14 guestrooms, and was built in the 19th century. It has comfortable rooms, traditionally decorated, with four-poster beds. There's a choice of bars – the **Ledwidge Lounge** or **Cannings** – and good food available in the

Gamekeeper's Lodge Bistro, which is popular with non-residents. The **Blackbird Carvery** serves lunch daily. It's a friendly place to stay and a good base for touring. Rates from $$. ☎ (041) 988-4444; fax 982-4205; www.conynghamarms.com; reservations@conynghamarms.com.

☆☆☆ The **Newgrange Hotel**, Bridge Street, Navan, is modern, having only opened in 1998. It has 62 bedrooms with good facilities. Guests and non-residents have a choice of where to eat. The **Bridge Restaurant**, which has imaginative Irish and international dishes, belongs to the Meath Good Food Circle. **Ruxton's Café** is less formal and serves a carvery lunch every day and has an evening menu. **Rowley's Bar** serves snacks and meals all day, and has live music nightly from Thursday to Monday. $$ with special offers and golf breaks available. ☎ (046) 907-4100; fax 907-3977; info@newgrangehotel.ie; www. newgrangehotel.ie.

☆☆ The **Headfort Arms Hotel**, Kells, has 44 bedrooms. Its **Café Therese** serves snacks and meals from 7:30 am to 10 pm, and the **Vanilla Pod Restaurant**, known for its fine food, is open to late evening, with an early-bird menu starting at 5:30, and also serves lunch on Sundays. Member of Meath Good Food Circle. From $. ☎ (046) 924-0063; headfortarms@eircom.net; www.headfortarms.com.

Hostels

There are three hostels, open all year, members of the IHHI (Independent Holiday Hostels of Ireland, see page 55).

Slane Farm Hostel. ☎/fax (041) 988-4985; info@slanefarmhostel.ie

Kells Hostel. ☎ (046) 924-9995; www.kellshostel.com

Bridge House Hostel, Trim. ☎ (046) 943-1848

Cottage Rentals

There's a delightful group of 300-year-old **thatched cottages** on the beach at Bettystown, furnished and fitted out to a high standard. ☎ (041) 982-8104; info@cottages-ireland.com; www.cottages-ireland.com.

Bettystown Beach Cottage

There are 12 lovely mews houses available in a courtyard setting in the Headfort Estate, a mile from Kells. It's a wonderful place, with gardens, open parkland, lots of ma-

ture trees, and the Headfort Golf Club with its 18-hole course designed by Christy O'Connor Junior. Toll-free in US ☎ 866-824-9330; (01) 478-2045; fax 478-4327; info@irishluxury.com or info@activeireland.ie; www.activeireland.ie.

The Inland Counties

County Kildare

Kildare is home to the **National Stud** and three racecourses, at **Curragh**, **Naas** and **Punchestown**. This inland county has areas of low-lying bogs on its western boundary. To the east, the foothills of the **Wicklow Mountains** meet its unique fertile plain, the **Curragh**, which has 6,000 acres of grassland where, in the early morning, you see beautiful thoroughbred racehorses exercising.

Visitors can walk in the countryside, play golf, fish, ride, or cruise its waterways. As well as the rivers **Liffey**, **Greese**, **Boyne** and **Barrow**, the county is traversed by both the **Royal Canal** and the **Grand Canal**, and there are historic places, houses and gardens to visit.

Kildare has become part of the commuter belt in recent decades, due to its proximity to Dublin, and huge housing estates have grown up around its towns. People traveling from Dublin south to Cork and other destinations are inclined to stick to the main roads and pass by, missing the attractions of this interesting county. One of the best ways of exploring it is by following the canals, either walking their towpaths or cruising their waters. Away from main roads, it's a peaceful county with plenty of wild fowl, birds and animals in its river valleys, bogs, woodlands and canals.

Its county capital and largest town is **Naas**, and others include **Athy**, **Celbridge**, **Kildare**, **Leixlip**, and the university town of **Maynooth**.

◆ Getting Here

By Car

Co. Kildare is linked to other parts of the country by main roads. The M4/N4/N6 Dublin-Galway/Sligo passes through Leixlip, Maynooth, Kilcock, Enfield. The M7/N7/

N21/N8 Dublin-Cork/Limerick/Killarney route takes you to Naas, Newbridge, Kildare, Monasterevin. The N78 Dublin-Kilkenny Waterford road passes through Naas, Kilcullen and Athy.

By Rail

Maynooth is on the Dublin-Sligo rail route from Connolly Station.

The county is also served by mainline routes to Mayo, Galway, Limerick, Kerry and Cork, from Heuston Station, with trains stopping at **Newbridge** and **Kildare Town**. The Dublin-Carlow/Kilkenny/Waterford train also stops at **Athy**.

By Bus

The county is on Expressway bus routes between Dublin and Galway, Sligo, Limerick, Cork, Waterford, and its towns and villages are also connected by bus.

◆ Tourist Information

Fáilte Ireland Tourist Office, Market Square, Kildare Town, open year-round, Monday to Saturday, 9:30 am to 5:30 pm, closed 1-2 pm. ☎ (045) 521-240; www.eastcoastmidlands.ie.

Kildare Fáilte, which promotes tourism in the county, is at 38 South Main Street, Naas. ☎ (045) 898-888; www.kildare.ie, info@visitkildare.ie.

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

Contact the Secretary, **Irish Family History Foundation**, c/o Kildare History & Family Research Centre, Riverbank, Main Street, Newbridge, Co. Kildare, Ireland; due to volume of interest, inquiries are accepted by mail only.

◆ Sightseeing

Naas

Naas takes its name from *Nás na Riogh*, the assembly place of kings, and was the seat of the Kings of Leinster for almost 700 years, until the death of the last king, Cearbhall, in 904. All that remains of its re-

Castle Lynch, Maynouth

gal past is a large man-made hill, or motte, in the middle of the town. It's a busy town, full of shops, pubs and restaurants.

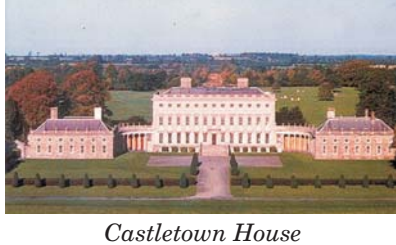
Kilcock, **Maynooth** and **Leixlip** are in a semicircle in the northeastern corner of Kildare, close to Dublin and, with nearby Celbridge, have grown an awful lot over the last decade or so with the city's expansion.

Maynooth Castle, built in the 13th century as the main residence of the Kildare Geraldines, is in the middle of the village of Maynooth. It's open from June to September daily and on Sundays in October. ☎ (01) 628-6744.

Leixlip

At the center of Leixlip there's also a **castle**, built about 1172 on a rock where the rivers Liffey and Rye meet. It's owned by the Honourable Desmond Guinness. He founded the Irish Georgian Society, which does excellent work preserving buildings of architectural merit and generally raising awareness of their importance. ☎ (01) 624-4430.

Celbridge



Castletown House

Celbridge is on the River Liffey, south of Leixlip and 12 miles (19 km) northeast of Naas. It's home to **Castletown House**, Ireland's largest Palladian mansion, built in the early 18th century for William Connolly, Speaker of the Irish Parliament, who made his fortune from estates forfeited after the Battle of the Boyne.

It's worth a visit for its magnificent exterior and for its impressive interior, which includes the only surviving intact 18th-century print room,

marvelous plasterwork by the Lafranchini brothers in its staircase hall, Irish period furniture and paintings. There are a number of follies in its grounds. Get here on buses 67/67A from Wellington Quay, Dublin. ☎ (01) 628-8252; castletown@ealga.ie; www.heritageireland.ie.

Kildare Town

The road through Kildare Town, 12 miles (19 km) southwest of Naas, is always busy. Kildare was founded by Saint Bridget (or Brigid) during the sixth century. The local king promised to give her what land she covered by her handkerchief when she spread it on the ground, and of course there was a miracle and she built a convent here.

SAINT BRIGID

The St. Brigid's cross is believed to protect homes from want and evil, and is made from woven rushes. Generations ago they were worn by Irish girls, but today you'll see them displayed on the walls of many Irish homes. Each year on St. Brigid's Day (February 2) they are blessed by Roman Catholic priests. You can also buy brooches and other jewelry made in the distinctive **X** shape.

Today, **St. Brigid's Cathedral** is beside the market square, but little remains of the original 13th-century building, as it was burned down long ago. Its most interesting feature is the window showing the three most important Irish saints, Bridget, Patrick and Columba. There's a 10th-century round tower nearby, open to visitors in summer, with lovely views from its summit.

On the edge of town is the **Irish National Stud**, home to some of Ireland's finest thoroughbreds, where you can enjoy a guided tour and see the racehorses in their paddocks or being exercised. There's also a museum. ☎ (045)521-251, stud@irish-national-stud.ie.

Visit the **Japanese Gardens** here, created by Tassa Eida and his son Minoru in 1906-10, and now considered the finest in Europe. It's a very peaceful place to visit, as you follow the 20 stages that symbolize the journey of a soul from Oblivion to Eternity, passing the Tunnel of Ignorance, the Hill of Ambition and so on. To mark the Millennium, St. Fiachra's garden was created, which visitors enter via an underground passage.

Fiachra (AD 590-670) is the patron saint of gardeners. Open February 12 to November 12, daily, 9:30 am to 6 pm. ☎ (045) 522-963; www.irish-national-stud.ie.stud@irish-national-stud.ie; japanesegardens@eircom.net.

Ballitore

Ballitore is an interesting little village in the southeastern corner of the county, founded in the late 17th century by Quakers from Yorkshire in England. The restored **Meeting House** (built about 1708) houses the local library and a small museum. **Mary Leadbeater's house** is on the corner of the village square, from where she witnessed the cruelty of the 1798 Rebellion – her account is one of the few independent descriptions.

Athy

Athy is a Heritage Town and the largest in South Kildare. It's on the **N78/R415,** on the Laois border, close to where the Grand Canal meets the River Barrow. It has a fine market square, some Georgian houses and the 16th-century **White's Castle**, which dominates the bridge over the river. There's a modern church, pentagon-shaped, which people either like or loathe.

The **Heritage Centre**, which traces the town's history, also has a Tourist Information point. ☎ (059) 863-3075; athyheritage@eircom.net; www.kildare.ie/athyonline.

◆ Adventures

On Foot

There are two waymarked long-distance walks in the county – the **Royal Canal Way** in the north, where Kildare meets Co. Meath, and in the south the **Barrow Way**, near the Laois border.

It is suggested that you start the Royal Canal Way at Maynooth. It is possible to get to Maynooth by bus from Dublin or by train from Connolly station in Dublin. The station and the railway fine follows the route of the Royal Canal Way for much of its distance from Dublin to Mullingar. The trail in fact starts just in front of Maynooth station. Following is the recommended way to walk or cycle the route.

- **Day 1**: Arrive at Maynooth. Proceed along Way to Enfield. Maynooth and Kilcock are now built-up ar-

eas of Dublin City so it is suggested that you set up camp beyond Kilcock.

- **Day 2/3**: Proceed along trail passing through Enfield and Thomastown towards Mullingar.
- **Day 4/5**: Mullingar to Ballynacargy and onwards to Ballymahon
- **Day 6/7**: Ballymahon to Cloonsheerin Junction. From here the canal branches. One branch brings you to Longford town. The other brings you to Clondra and onto the Shannon. The distances are similar.

The distances are: Maynooth to Enfield 11.5 miles (18.5 km); Enfield to Thomastown 14.4 miles (23 km); Thomastown to Mullingar 10. 5 miles (17 km); Mullingar to Ballynacargy 11.5 miles (18.5 km); Ballynacargy to Ballymahon 11.5 miles (18.5 km); Ballymahon to Cloonsheerin 10.5 miles (17km); Cloonsheerin to Longford five miles (8.4 km); Cloonsheerin to Clondra five miles (8 km).

The waymarked **Barrow Way** is 68 miles (109 km) long. Starting at Lowtown, it passes through Monasterevin and Athy, then goes south to the Barrow Valley and on to St. Mullins in Co. Carlow, where the river becomes tidal. You can cover this distance in a single journey in less than a week or explore shorter sections of the walk in a number of easy strolls.

- **Stage 1** starts in Lowtown and a distance of 14 miles (23 km) takes you to the town of Monasterevin. The raised banks of the canal offers beautiful views of the surrounding countryside with views of the Hill of Allen and the Wicklow Mountains.
- **Stage 2** takes you from Monasterevin to Athy – 14 miles (23 km). This stretch offers the visitor much of architectural interest with many old bridges and houses.
- **Stage 3** runs from Athy to Carlow – 12 miles (19 km). This is the first of four stretches that pass through the county of Carlow.
- **Stage 4**, Carlow to Bagenalstown 10 miles (16km). Milford, approximately seven km south of Carlow is one of the most attractive stretches along the River Barrow.

- **Stage 5** is Bagenalstown to Graiguenamanagh, a picturesque abbey town – 16 miles (26 km). The walk ends in Graiguenamanagh.
- **Stage 6** covers Graiguenamanagh to St. Mullins – four miles (six km).

There are about 70 miles (113 km) of canals – the **Grand**, **Royal** and the **Barrow** – and they're ideal for short- or long-distance self-guided walks along their towpaths. Do remember to dress for the weather, as there's little shelter on some sections. The paths can be very wet underfoot, so wear appropriate shoes. In places you are far from shops, so carry some refreshments with you.

An example of the towpath walks along the Royal Canal is the one that starts at **Cope Bridge** on the Confey road out of Leixlip. From there to Kilcock it's an 8½-mile walk (13.5 km). What's enjoyable about this route is that the landscape is surprisingly rural; although you are very near the sprawling Leixlip, the new housing is hidden from view by hedges.

The **Barrow line** links the main line of the Grand Canal with the River Barrow at Athy, 29 miles (47 km) south. It cuts through bog and farmland in the southwest, before running into Co. Laois and then back towards the town to join the Barrow.

There are a number of routes along the Grand Canal, including Hazelhatch to Sallins, eight miles (13 km) and Robertstown to Edenderry, 13 miles (21 km). The latter takes you to Lowtown Junction, where the main Grand Canal continues to the west and its Barrow branch begins, which is 28 miles (45 km) long. Barge horses used to be stabled at Lowtown and these days it's an inland dockyard.

DONADEA FOREST PARK

About eight miles (13 km) north of Naas on the R407 to Kilcock is Donadea Forest Park, run by Coillte, the State Foresty Service. It's a former estate and you can see the ruins of what was first a Norman keep, then from 1624 a house, reconstructed over the centuries with wings added. There's a Nature Trail, a Shrubbery Trail, and other features include a lake, and grove of beech about 150 years old.

On Wheels

Mondello Park, the only international racing circuit in the country, is near Naas. It hosts events for cars and motorcycles, and kart, rallycross and rallysprint. There's a motorsport museum and a range of performance driving courses. ☎ (045) 860-200; info@mondellopark.ie; www.mondellopark.ie.

In the Air

The Falcons Parateam of **skydivers** is based at Naas. Visitors are welcome. Contact Vernon McCarthy to see if they have an event scheduled. ☎ (045) 897-991; falcons@anything-irish.com.

On Water

Explore the Grand Canal with **Robertstown Barge Tours**, with full bar and buffet on board. Tours last from one to three hours, April-October. ☎ (045) 870-005.

CRUISING THE WATERWAYS

At Lowtown, near Robertstown, you can hire a narrow barge from **Lowtown Cruisers Limited**, based at the marina here, by the week, the day or weekend. On board, explore the Grand Canal, the Barrow and the Shannon. Full instructions are given before you set off. ☎ (045) 860-427; ltmarine@esatclear.ie; www.lowtownmarine.com.

Leisure Afloat, based at Levitstown Lock, Athy, offers cruising vacations and short breaks on barges. ☎ (056) 776-4395; info@leisureafloat.com; www.leisureafloat.com.

Canalways Ireland, based at Rathangan on the banks of the Barrow Line branch of the Grand Canal, offers vacations on board traditional steel canal boats. ☎ (045) 524-646; fax 524-019; info@canalways.ie.

FISHING

The county's waterways, its two main rivers the Rye and the Liffey, as well as the Royal and the Grand Canal, attract many interested in fishing. The Grand Canalhas a big stock of rudd, tench, perch, eels, some pike and roach. The River Liffey, with its 82-mile stretch through three counties, including Kildare, has abundant supplies of all fish types. The

Leixlip stretch of the Royal Canal is excellent for coarse fishing, all year round for roach, and for other species in summer. Contact **Leixlip Angling Development Society**, ☎ (01) 624-2968. Athy, Leixlip, Monastervin, Prosperous and Vicarstown are all angling centers. Take a look at www.irishfishingholidays.com or contact tourist information.

- ***The Tackle Shop**, Eyre Street, Newbridge, ☎ (045) 435-853*
- ***Noel Conlon and Sons**, Eyre Street, Newbridge, ☎ (045) 433-311*
- ***Countryman Angling and Game Supplies**, Pacelli Road, Naas, ☎ (045) 879-341*

On Horseback

Kildare describes itself as the "Thoroughbred county" and anyone interested in equestrian facilities should look at the information at www.kildarehorse.ie. It lists the following stables for riders at all levels of experience:

- ***Abbeyfield Equestrian Farm Centre**, Clane, ☎ (045) 868-188*
- ***Acorn Equestrian Centre**, Celbridge, ☎ (01) 628-9116*
- ***Coilog Eventing Centre**, Naas, ☎ (045) 860-842*
- ***Osberstown Riding Centre**, Naas, ☎ (045) 879-074*

◆ Golf

The county has an excellent choice of courses, the most prestigious of which is the **K Club**, Straffan, with its two 18-hole championship courses designed by Arnold Palmer. ☎ (01) 601-7200; fax 601-7299; www.kclub.ie; resortsales@kclub.ie.

Five miles (eight km) from the K Club is the **Pinetrees Golf Club** at Clane, ☎ (045) 869-525. Others include:

- ***Killeen**, at Kill, ☎ (045) 866-003; admin@killeensc.ie*
- ***Knockanally**, Donadea, ☎ (045) 869-322; golf@knockanally.com*
- ***Millicent at Clane**, ☎ (045) 893-279; derekkilleen@eircom.net*
- *The **Athy Club** was founded in 1906 and has a mature parkland course divided in two by a tributary of the Barrow. ☎ (059) 863-1729; athygolfclub@ireland.com; www.athygolfclub.com.*

- *Southeast of Athy, the course at the **Kilkea Castle Hotel Golf Club**, Castledermot, has been developed around the 12th-century castle, on the riverbank. ☎ (059) 914-5556; kilkeagolfclub@eircom.net; www.kilkeacastlehotelgolf.com.*
- *The **Bodenstown Club**, Sallins, has two 18-hole courses. ☎ (045) 897-7096; fax 898-126.*
- *At the **Castlewarden Club**, Straffan, the members have restored the historic house, so visitors can enjoy its grandeur. ☎ (01) 458-9254; castlewarden@clubi.ie.*
- *The **Celbridge Elm Hall Golf Club**'s course has three lakes, making it a challenge. ☎ (01) 628-8208; fax 825-9887.*
- *The **Cill Dara Club** at Little Curragh has a nine-hole course. ☎ (045) 521-433. The **Curragh Golf Club** nearby claims to have the oldest course in the country. ☎ (045) 441-714; fax 442-476; curraghgolf@eircom.net.*
- *There are two clubs near Carbury in the northwest corner of the county: **Highfield**, ☎ (0405) 973-1021, hgc@indigo.ie, www.highfield-golf.ie; and **Edenderry**, ☎ (0405) 973-1072.*
- *The **Naas Club**, founded in 1896, is the second oldest in the county. ☎ (045) 874-644; naasgolf@eircom.net.*
- *At Prosperous, near Naas, there's the **Woodlands Club**, ☎ (045) 860-777.*
- *There's a choice at Newbridge: **Red Lane Golf and Football Centre**, ☎ (045) 435-035; and **Newbridge Golf Club**, ☎ (045) 486-110.*
- *In the northeast, the **Kilcock Club** has a parkland course with beautiful mature trees. ☎ (01) 628-4074.*

◆ Where to Stay

For accommodations pricing guide, see page 142.

Hotels & Resorts

☆☆☆☆☆ The K Club is near Straffan. Its full name is **Kildare Hotel & Country Club**, and it's an absolutely wonderful place to stay. The hotel is in a sensitively restored stately home surrounded by an extensive estate. The excellent staff is so unobtrusive that you feel you're at home, yet have all the advantages of a five-star hotel.

Kildare Hotel & Country Club

There's a choice of rooms – superior, deluxe and suites – including garden suites with two bedrooms, a lounge and dining room, linked to the hotel.

You can also select where to dine, from the elegance of **The Byerly Turk**, which serves French cuisine with an Irish twist, to the stylish **Legends Restaurant** and its European menu.

Among the excellent facilities is a leisure center with pool, which can be reached directly from your hotel room. The 330 acres of grounds include gardens running alongside the river. More energetic exercise includes indoor tennis and squash, or golf. The K Club course is home to the Smurfit European Open and venue for the Ryder Cup in 2005. You can also go salmon fishing on the hotel's one-mile stretch of the River Liffey, or coarse fishing with a choice of five stocked lakes. Other leisure activities include clay target shooting, horseback riding, lessons if wanted, and bikes can be hired. Special golf and other packages are available. $$$$. ☎ (01) 627-3333; fax 601-7299; resortsales@kclub.ie; www.kclub.ie. Non-residents can also enjoy some of the leisure activities at the K Club, so phone and ask.

☆☆☆ **Leixlip House Hotel** overlooks the village and is only eight miles (13 km) from the center of Dublin. It's a Georgian home dating back to 1722 which has been transformed into a luxury hotel with 19 bedrooms, mostly furnished with antiques. The **Bradaun Restaurant** is elegant and its menu is modern Irish, with local and fresh produce a priority, including meat, fish and game. Food is also available in the lounge. Both guests and non-residents are advised to reserve a table in advance here, as it has become popular. From $$ (with

special Golfer's Delight and Gourmet Weekenders also available). ☎ (01) 624-2268; fax 624-4177; reservations@leixliphouse.com; www.leixliphouse.com.

Leixlip House

☆☆☆☆ **Kilkea Castle** in Castledermot is the oldest inhabited castle in Ireland, built in 1180 by Hugh de Lacy, and now transformed into a luxury hotel. There's a huge choice of activities for guests, including fishing on the River Griese, clay-pigeon shooting, riding, shooting, and golfing on its own course, which encircles the castle. You can wander the lovely gardens or play tennis, and there's an indoor pool, gym and exercise room. The **de Lacy Restaurant** has an imaginative menu. From $$$ for room only, special weekend packages available. ☎ (059) 914-5156; fax 914-5187; kilkea@iol.ie; www.kilkeacastle.ie.

Kilkea Castle

☆☆ **Hazel Hotel**, on the outskirts of Monasterevin on the Cork/Limerick road (N7), has 24 comfortable guest rooms; the menu ranges from international to Irish dishes. There's also a Bistro and Carvery, very popular with passing travellers. Rates $$. ☎ (045) 525-373; fax 525-810; www.hazelhotel.com, sales@hazelhotel.com.

Martinstown House, The Curragh, was built in 1832-40 in Gothic cottage orné style in what was originally part of the estate of the Dukes of Leinster. Its grounds are wonderful, including a walled garden and a croquet lawn. It's a very welcoming and attractive place to stay, with just four double bedrooms. Dinner is available, but you must book the day before. The house belongs to the Hidden Ireland group (see page 53), and is not classified under the hotel system.

$$$. ☎ (045) 441-269; info@martinstownhouse.com; www.martinstownhouse.com.

Cottage & Apartment Rentals

Rent an apartment at the **Royal Canal Court**, Kilcock, used by students of Maynooth University during term time. You can enjoy the Royal Canal, perhaps go canoeing, stroll along its banks or follow the Royal Canal Way. There are golf courses nearby and you're very close to Dublin. There's a choice of apartments from a two-bedroom penthouse (sleeps three) to a three-bedroom apartment (sleeps five). They offer an amazing value, from about €275-450 per week. Available from late May to early September. ☎ (01) 624-1625; www.royalcanalcourt.com; info@robertstownholidayvillage.com.

Robertstown Holiday Village has eight cottages, each with its own entrance and garden facing the Grand Canal. They have two bedrooms and are well equipped and furnished. They're available by the week or for short breaks. Very good value at prices from €240-450 per week. ☎ (045) 870-870; fax 870-869; kmbgorey@gofree.indigo.ie.

Camping & RV Parks

☆☆☆ **Forest Farm Caravan and Camping Park** is three miles (4.8 km) from Athy on the N78 Dublin road, only 13 miles (21 km) from the National Stud, Japanese Gardens and Curragh Racecourse at Kildare Town. The park is on a 140-acre working farm, set back from the road, and is open all year. It also offers self-catering apartments and B&B accommodations. ☎/fax (059) 973-1231; www.accommodationathy.com; forestfarm@eircom.net.

◆ Where to Eat

Some of the best places to eat are in the hotels already listed, and there are plenty of other choices in all of the towns and villages of Kildare.

The **Johnstown Inn** is in the village of the same name, just outside Naas. Food is served in the lounge from noon to 10 pm, with a good choice on its bar menu. The Inn's **Shiraz Restaurant** is open from 6 pm to 10 pm, later on Friday and Saturday. You can also stay here overnight; rates from €65, breakfast extra and available from 9am all day.

The Inn is particularly lively on weekends, as its **Sound House** nightclub hosts live acts. ☎ (045) 897-547; fax 874-638; www.johnstowninn.com, info@johnstowninn.com.

On the Kildare Town side of Newbridge, near the Curragh Race Course, is **The Talk of the Town Restaurant**. It's open every day from 9 am to 11 pm and specializes in steak; seafood and international dishes are also on its menu. ☎ (045) 43115.

A favorite spot is **Silken Thomas**, in The Square, Kildare Town. It has three bars and a restaurant, and is very popular, especially when there are races at the nearby Curragh course. It serves good meals at great value, including steaks, seafood, poultry, vegetarian options.

Tyrrells Restaurant at Ballindoolin House and Gardens, Carbury, is open for lunch, Wednesday-Sunday, and for dinner, Wednesday-Saturday. In addition to the excellent food, prepared with vegetables grown there, it's a lovely place to be. Ballindoolin is an historic house set in parkland, with woodland walks and walled kitchen gardens, open to the public May-September. ☎ (046) 973-2400; www.ballindoolin.com.

County Offaly

Offaly is a county of contrasting landscapes, from flat boglands to mountains. The longest river in the country, the **Shannon**, forms its western border, and the **Grand Canal** links it to **Edenderry** in the east, passing through **Tullamore**, its main town, on the way.

AN AMERICAN CONNECTION

Offaly and Westmeath belong to **Ely O'Carroll Country** – named after the Gaelic lords who ruled here for 600 years. The landscape is dotted with dozens of their castles. After the O'Carroll lands were confiscated for the Plantations in the 17th century (see page 12), Charles Carroll traveled to America where he settled in Maryland. Among his distinguished descendants were his namesake, Charles Carroll of Carrollton, who was the last to sign the Declaration of Independence, and Bishop John Carroll, founder of Georgetown University.

In the southeast, the **Slieve Bloom Mountains National Park** is the largest unbroken area of upland blanket bog and forestry in Ireland. Its deep valleys have lots of streams and rivers meandering through them. The **Clara Bog** is a natural heritage area, preserved for its flora, fauna and soak system, while **Mongan Bog** is protected for its unusual and intricate habitats. The **Lough Boora Parklands** have been developed from former cutaway bogs. Hills, called "eskers," were formed 10,000 years ago from gravel and sand left behind when the ice melted.

Slieve Bloom Mountains

From 1556, when conquered by the English, until 1920, Offaly was known as King's County. Tullamore and Birr are now Heritage Towns. With its streams, lakes, bogs and woodland, Offaly is an ideal destination for anyone interested in fishing, walking, enjoying an unspoiled environment and discovering the natural or built heritage.

◆ Getting Here

Offaly is right in the center of the country and Tullamore is served by main routes N52-N6-N4 from Dublin (66 miles/106 km); N80-N8-N25 from Cork (128 miles/206 km) and N80-N6-N18 from Galway (82 miles/132 km). Tullamore is also on the Dublin-Galway rail line.

◆ Tourist Information

Fáilte Ireland Tourist Office is in Tullamore Dew Heritage Centre, **Tullamore**. It's open all year. ☎ (0506) 52617.

There's a Tourist Office at **Clonmacnoise**, open from Easter to October, ☎ (090) 967-4134; and another on Castle Street, **Birr**, open May to September, ☎ (0509) 20110.

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

Irish Midlands Ancestry provides an ancestral research service for counties Offaly and Laois, and is based on Bury Quay, Tullamore, ☎/fax (0506) 21421; ohas@iol.ie; www.irishmidlandsancestry.com.

◆ Sightseeing

Tullamore

Tullamore is a pleasant market town on the river of the same name, which retains some of its historic streetscapes. It's famous for Tullamore Dew whiskey, no longer made here, and is well worth visiting the **Heritage Centre** in the original bonded warehouse, dating from 1897, which stands on the bank of the Grand Canal. The exhibition covers the town's history, as well as focusing on the production of whiskey and of Irish Mist liqueur. There's a charming café/bar there, with a full license, where you can go without paying the Heritage Centre entry fee. Open May-September, Monday-Saturday, 9 am-6 pm; October-April, 10 am-5 pm; Sundays, noon to 5 pm all year.

As you wander around Tullamore, there are buildings worth noting, and you can follow a signposted trail. The **Town Hall** dates back to 1790. Don't miss **St. Catherine's Church of Ireland**, designed by Francis Johnston in 1815. The Catholic church deserves a look for its impressive timber interiors and its stained glass windows by Irish artist Harry Clark. All that remains of the jail is its Gothic façade.

Edenderry

Edenderry, northeast of Tullamore, is a market town that takes its name from great oak woods that used to grow on its hill until the last century. It has a signposted town trail and **Grange Castle**, with its wildflower labyrinth, based on an early Christian design, is worth a visit. ☎ (0405) 973-3316; www.ils.ie/grange.

Birr

Birr is 22 miles (35 km) southwest of Tullamore on the N52/N62. It's one of Ireland's Heritage Towns, because of its Georgian architecture, and is worth more than a brief visit. There's a signposted trail around the town.

You need to allow at least two or three hours just to visit the **Birr Castle Demesne** and take in its unique collection of rare plants and trees. The wonderful gardens – the biggest in the country – are spread out around two rivers, the Camcor and Little Brosna, and include a Victorian fernery and formal gardens. The Parsons family, the Earls of Rosse, have lived here since 1620, and among them were a number of remarkable scientists, inventors, and photographers. They and other Irish scientists are celebrated and their achievements documented in **Ireland's Historic Science Centre** housed in the former stables of the castle. The largest telescope in the world for 70 years was built here in 1845 by the Third Earl and can be seen in the grounds. The **Little Space Café** offers snacks and hot meals at reasonable prices. Open daily, year-round; summer, 9 am to 6 pm; October to mid March, 10 am to 4 pm. ☎ (0509) 20336; fax 21583; www.birrcastle.com; info@birrcastle.com.

Clonmacnoise

Clonmacnoise is 12 miles (19 km) north of Banagher on the R444, and is one of the largest and most impressive monastic sites in the country. It was founded in 545 by Saint Ciaran. The ruins are on the banks of the Shannon, and include nine churches, two round towers and a castle dating from the 12th century. Rory O'Connor, the last High King of Ireland, is said to be buried in the cathedral, which has an intriguing whispering arch. In the Visitor Centre are three high crosses, early Christian grave slabs and there's an audio-visual show.

Open daily year-round; very busy in the summer. Mid May to early September, 9 am to 7 pm; September to October, 10 am to 6 pm; November to mid March, until 5:30 pm; mid March to mid May, until 6 pm; closed Christmas Day. ☎ (0905) 967-4195. The Tourist Office is open from Easter to October. ☎ (0905) 967-4134. Coffee shop on site.

◆ Adventures

On Foot

There are three waymarked long-distance routes in the county: The Slieve Bloom Way, the Offaly Way, and part of the Grand Canal Way.

The **Slieve Bloom Way** (48 miles/77 km) starts at Glenbarrow and ends at Glenkeen, with memorable scenery, including waterfalls, rocky outcrops and deep glens. Its highest point is the Glendine Gap (1,510 feet/460 m) from where there are wonderful views; and its longest stage is Forelacka to Glenkeen (12 miles/19 km).

The **Offaly Way** (18 miles/29 km) connects the Slieve Bloom Way to the Grand Canal Way. It starts at Cadamstown and ends in Ferbane. Its longest stage (eight miles) is from Kilcormac to the Grand Canal and the highest point is Knock Hill (458 feet/140 m).

The longest stage of the **Grand Canal Way** (71 miles/114 km) is in Offaly, between Tullamore and Ferbane (16 miles/26 km) and the route, which starts at the Lucan Road Bridge in Co. Dublin and runs through Co. Kildare, also ends here, at Shannon Harbor near Banagher.

Other walks include those in the forests at Garryhinch, Busherstown, Durrow, Goldengrove, Blackwood and in Slieve Bloom Environment Park.

You can also walk along the Grand Canal between Edenderry and Tullamore, passing through the Bog of Allen and Croghan Hill, where St. Brigid is said to have received her veil – in other words, became a nun. There's a lovely view from its summit.

WALKING VACATION

Stay at **Ardmore House**, Kinnity, where Christine Byrne arranges walking trips, with a choice that includes the Slieve Bloom Way, shorter and circular walks. Her guesthouse is in the mountains and is a friendly and relaxed Victorian home, with brass beds, turf fire and home cooking. ☎ (0509) 37009.

On Wheels

BY RAIL

Between April and early October, you can explore the bog, hear about its history, and see how turf is cut by taking a trip on the **Clonmacnoise & West Offaly Railway**, from Blackwater near Shannonbridge. Tours run on the hour from 10 am and 5 pm. ☎ (090) 967-4450; bograil@bnm.ie; www.bnm.ie.

CYCLING

The Offaly terrain is ideal for cycling, and you can rent bikes from a number of places, including **Buckley Cycles**, Bury Quay, Tullamore. ☎ (0506) 52240, and from **Eamon and Marie McManus**, Shannonbridge, ☎ (090) 967-4189.

On Water

BOATING

Offaly is the perfect destination for anyone who enjoys cruising or other activities on water. From Banagher and Edenderry you can take a cruise on the River Shannon or the Grand Canal. Leisure traffic has given the canal a new lease of life, and year-round you see colorful boats.

Adventure canoeing vacations are also available from Banagher, which has a sub-aqua club, or you can go rowing at Tullamore. You can rent canoes on a daily or weekly basis from **Shannon Adventure Canoeing** at Banagher Marina, ☎ (0509) 51411.

Celtic Canal Cruisers, based at Tullamore, rents out boats; the smallest sleeps two. ☎ (0506) 21861; fax 51266; celticcanal@eircom.net; www.celticcanalcruisers.com.

From Banagher Marina, **Silver Line Cruisers** operates a fleet of modern diesel cruisers, the smallest being two-berth. ☎ (0509) 51112; fax 51632; www.silverlinecruisers.com; info@silverlinecruisers.com.

Carrick Craft are also based at Banagher. ☎ (01) 278-1666; www.cruise-ireland.com.

The Shannon Callows, along the river south of Banagher, floods during the winter; because it has never been drained or ploughed, it is unchanged since it was farmed by monks over 1,000 years ago, and boasts a rich diversity of flora and fauna.

SWIMMING

There are pools at Banagher (outdoor) and Birr (indoor) on the Roscrea Road, ☎ (0509) 20343.

FISHING

The environment is so clean here that fish thrive in the county's waters, and many come to enjoy its rivers – the Shannon, Little Brosna and Suck – as well as the Grand Canal.

The Central Fisheries Board and the Shannon Regional Fisheries Board (SRFB) look after this area and have developed access and other facilities. Contact the **Angling Section, SRFB**, ☎ (0509) 21777; info@shannon-fishery-board.ie. Its Web site links you to others and has lots of information and useful contacts: www.shannon-fishery-board.com.

Banagher is an established angling center, and an ideal base to fish the mid-Shannon, Suck and Brosna rivers, as well as the Grand Canal and the Boora Lakes. It has specialist operators, and anglers are encouraged to hire boats and explore water where access is possible only that way.

There are two **angling festivals** at Banagher, in Spring and Autumn.

FISHING EXCURSIONS

Sleepy Hollow Angling Services, Taylor's Cross, Banagher, is also a bed and breakfast. It's 2½ miles (four km) from the Shannon, run by Monica and Paddy Kelleher. He's an expert on fishing, stocks bait and other supplies, and has boats to hire. The guesthouse is comfortable, with good food prepared by Monica. ☎ (0509) 51273.

The Old Forge, West End, Banagher, run by Raymond Duthie, also provides a boat and rod rental service and has a tackle shop, with permits and salmon licenses. It's also a bed and breakfast, with five rooms, each sleeping two. ☎ (0509) 51504; kmduthie2@eircom.net.

TACKLE SHOPS

Other tackle shops in Offaly, where you'll get advice and local knowledge:

Killeens Village Tavern, Shannonbridge, ☎ (090) 967-4112; dermot.killeen@mail.esb.ie

The Tackle Shop, Rahan, Tullamore, ☎ (0506) 55979

Paul Kelly, Main Street, Birr, ☎ (0509) 21128; kello@indigo.ie

Alo Moran, Shannonbridge, ☎ (090) 967-4124

Brendan Kenny, Bridge Street, Clara, ☎ (0506) 31866

FISHING, WALKING, BIRD-WATCHING

The **Lough Boora Parklands**, south of the Grand Canal near Tullamore, have four freshwater fisheries and provide habitat for a wide range of flora and fauna. With more than 130 different birds recorded here, it should be a major attraction for anyone interested in our feathered friends. Birdwatchers are catered to with hides, one designed specially for wheelchair access.

Loch an Dochais has facilities for the disabled and juniors; **Boora Lake** and **Finnamore Lake** for coarse fishing; and **Loch Clochan** for catch and release fly fishing. Nearby **Kilcormac village** has become a coarse angling center.

You don't have to be interested in fishing to appreciate the Parklands, as there are more than 30 miles (48 km) of paths; take a walk and enjoy the peaceful surroundings. ☎ (0506) 45885; loughboora@eircom.net; www.loughbooraparklands.ie.

On Horseback

Birr Equestrian Centre offers treks and has indoor and outdoor arenas with showjumping fences. ☎ (0509) 21961.

Kinnity Castle Equestrian Centre offers lessons, trailing and trekking. ☎ (0509) 373-118.

Annaharvey Farm, four miles (6.4 km) outside Tullamore on the road to Portarlington, offers accommodations on a bed-and-breakfast or full-board basis in a former grain barn, fitted out to the highest

standard. Food is freshly prepared using local produce and there's an open fire.

Equestrian facilities include indoor and outdoor arenas, and it caters to all levels of experience, show jumping, and cross-country. There's also a special walking route and routes for cyclists. ☎ (0506) 43544, fax 43766; info@annaharveyfarm.ie; www.annaharveyfarm.ie.

Croghan Hill Stables, Rhode, offers tuition and cross-country rides. There's a restored stone farmhouse, 200 years old, to rent on a weekly basis or for shorter breaks. ☎ (0405) 973-7146; croghanhill@eircom.net.

◆ Golf

Tullamore Golf Club is just south of the town on the road to Kinnity, in mature parkland of oak, beech and chestnut. ☎ (0506) 51757.

Esker Hills Golf and Country Club is three miles (4.8 km) northwest of Tullamore off the main road to Clara. Its course has sand-based greens and is renowned for its stunning setting. ☎ (0506) 55999; info@eskerhillsgolg.com; www.eskerhillsgolf.com.

Castle Barna Golf Club is at Daingean, south of Tyrellspass and nine miles (14.5 km) northeast of Tullamore, on the banks of the Grand Canal. It's a mixture of parkland interspersed with challenging water hazards. ☎ (0506) 53384; info@castlebarna.ie; www.castlebarna.ie.

The **Birr Golf Club** is on the Banagher Road. ☎ (0509) 20082.

◆ Where to Stay

For accommodations pricing guide, see page 142.

Hotels

☆☆☆☆ **Tullamore Court Hotel** is built around a courtyard where guests can sit, and has an excellent leisure center. There's regular entertainment in its **Furlong Bar**, where a reasonably priced menu is available all day or you can choose to eat in the **Foyer**, which is quieter and has comfortable seating. Its **Windmill Restaurant** serves local produce. Rates from $$$, with special offers available. ☎ (0506) 46666; fax (0506) 46677; www.tullamorecourthotel.ie; info@tullamorecourthotel.ie.

☆☆☆ **Dooly's Hotel,** Emmet Square, Birr, has welcomed visitors since 1747, when they arrived by horse-drawn coach. The rooms are clean, pleasantly decorated, with big closets, and have spacious bathrooms with large towels. As it's such an old building, there are unusual short flights of steps here and there, giving it lots of character. It has a restaurant/coffee bar serving meals and snacks (not very attractive, but the prices are good), and a large bar. With the nightclub on weekend nights, and its location in the market square, on the corner of the main road, this is not the place to stay if you want silence. Unlike most Irish hotels, it charges the same rates year-round, and is an excellent value. From $$, special offers available. ☎ (0509) 20032; www.doolyshotel.com, doolyshotel@esatclear.ie.

☆☆ **Brosna Lodge Hotel**, in the middle of Banagher, is family-run and friendly. It has 14 guestrooms, offers room service, or you can choose between eating in **Pat's Olde Bar** or in **The Fields Restaurant**, both using good local produce. Traditional music sessions take place in the bar on weekends. Excellent value from $. ☎ (0509)51350; fax 51521; www.brosnalodge.com; info@brosnalodge.com.

Stay at a Castle

Kinnity Castle, Birr, has a long and interesting history, dating back to the early 13th century. It's now a lovely country residence with 10 bedrooms retaining their original dimensions in keeping with the period of the castle. It's classified U, which means it meets mandatory requirements but has opted out of the hotel classification system. Enjoy excellent cuisine, fine wines, open log fires and candlelight. Plus there's a huge estate of 10,000 acres to explore, where there's lots of wildlife. Activities include tennis, fishing, shooting and a fully equipped health and leisure center. Equestrian vacations are a specialty, with lessons, trailing and trekking through the estate. $$$. Toll-free from US ☎ 1-888-606-2667; (0509) 37318; kinnittycastle@eircom.net; www.kinnitycastle.com.

Camping & RV Parks

The **Glebe Caravan Park** is in a lovely rural setting in the village of Clonfanlough, near Clonmacnoise, and is open Easter to October 15. It's family-run and friendly. ☎ (090) 643-0277; www.glebecaravanpark.ie; info@glebecaravanpark.ie.

Hostel

Crank House Hostel, Main Street, Banagher, is open all year. ☎ (090) 645-7561; abguinan@eircom.net; www.banagher.net.

◆ Where to Eat

At Ferbane on the N62 Birr-Athlone road, there's the delightful **Maidin Gheal**, a home bakery and restaurant, open 9 am-6 pm, Monday-Saturday. It serves delicious snacks and meals, including an all-day breakfast.

The **Riverbank Restaurant** serves fine food in a lovely peaceful setting looking out on the Little Brosna River, a mile from Birr on the N53 road to Borrisokane. It's open for lunch and dinner, Tuesday-Sunday. ☎ (0509) 21528; riverbankrest@msn.com; www.birrnet.com.

County Laois

Laois is an inland county, one of the smallest at 664 square miles (1,726 square km), and is surrounded by Kildare, Offaly, Tipperary and Kilkenny. It's picturesque, especially when you get away from main roads. Its landscape includes the **Slieve Bloom Mountains**, one of the oldest ranges in Ireland, which rise gently from the limestone central plain, with heather and blanket bog on their slopes. **Mount Arderin** is known as the top of Ireland, from where (weather permitting) the four provinces can be seen. The mountains are a walker's paradise with marvellous features, scenic views, and fascinating flora and fauna.

The countryside is dotted with remains of ring-forts, ruined strongholds and monastic buildings; more than 1,000 of them have been identified. Laois was created out of a number of unrelated Gaelic territories and became Queen's County in 1556, when Mary was on the throne of England. Along with Offaly, this was the first county to be planted in Ireland.

Those early settlers were mainly smallholders, so you won't find as many big estates with grand houses as you do elsewhere, although they did build some attractive towns and villages, and mansions at Abbeyleix and Emo.

The county suffered badly during the Great Famine, its population dropping from over 153,000 in 1841 to just over 73,000 in 1881. Like

other counties, it had its workhouses, into which the poor were forced, among them the one at Donaghmore built in 1850.

Laois offers plenty of activities for visitors – riverside walks, charming villages and towns to discover, and lots of historic sites to visit. It's also popular for fishing and playing golf.

Laois is pronounced "leesh" and **Portlaoise**, its county capital and largest town, as "port-leesha." Its other main towns include **Abbeyleix**, **Mountrath**, **Mountmellick** and **Portarlington**.

◆ Getting Here

Portlaoise is on main routes N7 from Dublin (52 miles/84 km); N8 from Cork (104 miles/167 km) and N7-N62-N65-N6-N18 from Galway (89 miles/143 km).

Laois is on mainline rail routes, with stations at Portlaoise and Portarlington. There is a regular bus service to Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Athlone and Waterford from Portlaoise, with other routes connecting towns and villages.

◆ Tourist Information

Fáilte Ireland Tourist Office, James Finton Lawlor Avenue, Portlaoise; open June to September, Monday to Friday, 9:30 am to 5:20 pm; ☎ (0502) 21178; www.eastcoastmidlands.ie.

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

Irish Midlands Ancestry, based on Bury Quay, Tullamore, does genealogical research for Laois, ☎/fax (0506) 21421; ohas@iol.ie; www.irishmidlandsancestry.com.

◆ Sightseeing

Portlaoise

The county town was founded by Queen Mary in 1555 as a walled fort to protect the southern end of the Pale, and was named Maryborough after her. The first English court and jail in Ireland were built here, and today there's still a large prison on the edge of town.

There are some interesting old streetscapes in the middle of town, and shops that are full of character, but the town seems rather overwhelmed by more modern developments. You can park just off the

ring road and walk through to the center – it's worth the effort in daytime as it's busy with shoppers. But in the evenings it's very quiet and there isn't much choice of places to eat, though there are lots of pubs.

About four miles (6.4 km) east of Portlaoise is the **Rock of Dunamase**, which stands out above the surrounding countryside at a height of 150 feet – it was noted by Ptolemy, the first-century mapmaker. The town was a fort back in 140 AD and since then has had a fascinating history, mirroring Ireland's, including being plundered by the Vikings in 842, and being given to Strongbow by the King of Leinster in 1169 as part of Aoife's dowry. The first castle was built here in the mid-13th century and was the home of William Earl Marshall, then of the O'Moores of Laois. It was given to the Earl of Thomond in 1609, fought over during Cromwell's time and destroyed by his soldiers.

The **Great Heath** at Maryborough below the Rock is one of the most significant archaeological sites in the country, with signs of ring barrows, ring forts and plough ridges.

Touring Route

There's a signposted **Heritage Trail** to follow by car or bike around Co. Laois, which you can start at various points. **Durrow**, on the N8 main Cork-Dublin road, is recommended. This estate village has interesting buildings around its green.

Continue from there to **Ballinakill**, off R432, an example of a 17th-century market town. Stop here to visit the beautiful **Heywood Gardens**, completed in 1912 by Sir Edward Lutyens, now on the grounds of the Community School. Open daylight hours all year, and free. Tours every Sunday in July and August at 3 pm. ☎ (0502) 33563/51863; www.heritageireland.ie, heywoodgardens@ealga.ie.

Next comes **Abbeyleix**, another estate town, developed by the Viscounts de Vesci. Heavy traffic passing through somewhat spoils the enjoyment of its main street, but it does retain some character. The carpets for the ill-fated Titanic were made here.

Go through Ballyroan to the delightful village of **Timahoe**, which has a 12th-century Round Tower, all that's survived of its seventh-century monastery.

Near Stradbally is the **Rock of Dunamase** (see previous page), and then you come to the canal village of **Vicarstown**, and on to the gracious Emo Court House and Gardens.

Emo Court (North Atlantic Skyline)

Emo Court was designed in 1790 by Sir James Gandon, who is famous for his Custom House, Four Courts, and other fine buildings in Dublin and elsewhere. Covering 75 acres, its gardens are wonderful, with formal lawns around the house, statuary, and lots of tree-lined walks and wild areas. Winston Churchill used to stay here.

Emo is in the care of the State Heritage Service and its gardens are open all year. Tours every Sunday at 3pm in July & August. Emo Court is open mid June to mid September, Tuesday to Sunday, 10: 30 am to 5 pm, last tour 4:30 pm. ☎/fax (0502) 772-6573; (056) 772-1450; info@heritageireland.ie, www.heritageireland.ie.

Next comes **Portarlington**, settled by French Huguenots, with many fine buildings. Then it's on to **Mountmellick**, which has its own Walking Heritage Trail. It was founded by Quakers in the 17th century as a center for cotton, linen and woolen production. Out of Mountmellick follow the signs to **Camross**, a sweet little village at the foot of the Slieve Blooms. Here you can visit **The Poet's Cottage**, which dates from the Great Famine.

Tours

Siúltoirí Cluain na Slí, Clonaslee, runs guided walks and bus tours through the Slieve Blooms. ☎ (0502) 48197.

◆ Adventures

On Foot

There are about 300 miles (483 km) of "off road" walking routes in Laois, in the areas of Sli Dala, Erkina, Cullahill, Abbeyleix, Stradbally, Durrow, Timahoe, Mounthrath, Clonaslee, Spink and Slieve Margy.

The **Slieve Bloom Mountains** have many different walking routes passing ancient geological and other features, with marvelous views.

The long-distance walking route, **The Slieve Margy Way** (44 miles), is in the southeast of the county. It's a circular network of walking tracks passing through villages, including Graigecullen, Maganey, Arles, Rushes, Wolfhill and the Swan. Running along the banks of the Barrow River, it then takes to the hills, rising over 1,000 feet (305 m) to the top of the Castlecomer Plateau.

In **Cullahill**, between Durrow and Urlingford on the main Cork-Dublin N8 road, you can walk past the castle up onto Cullahill Mountain or take the more leisurely route along the banks of the River Goul and visit the 12th-century ruin of **Aghmacart Priory**.

At **Oughaval Wood**, Stradbally, there's a walk to the **Mass Rock** deep in the forest, where local people gathered to attend Mass during penal times (1691-1727). There's also the **Cobbler's Walk** (about four miles/6.5 km), which takes you to a fine example of a folly known as **Cobbler's Castle**. Stradbally is a fine place to begin.

The picturesque village of **Clonaslee** is on **The Munster Way** long distance waymarked route, and tracks follow and cross the Glenlahan, Gorragh and Clodiagh rivers.

Between Rathdowney and Ballacolla, there's some lovely scenery in the **Granstown** area. Once part of the Castletown estate, home of the Fitzpatricks of Upper Ossory, the **Granstown Lake** and surrounding countryside is steeped in history.

Nearby, there's fine walking around **Durrow**, especially the **Leafy Loops**, a 13-mile (21-km) walk through woodlands. Sites of interest include the spectacular **Castle Durrow**, **St. Fintan's Well**, and old and new bridges spanning the River Erkina.

Four waymarked ways begin from the village of **Timahoe**, with its **Round Tower**, where the River Bauteogue wanders through a broad and fertile valley, with Fossy Mountain on one side and Cullenagh Mountain on the other.

From **Mountrath** there are three waymarked routes, and three more start at **Monicknew** in the Slieve Blooms. Tracks go into the mountains and the surrounding areas, passing bogs, forests, rivers and historical sites.

Other signposted walking areas include the **Canal Walk in Portarlington**, the **Nature Trail in Castletown** and **Slí na Sláinte in Ballyroan**.

Part of the **Slieve Bloom Way** runs through Laois. It's a circular trek that can be joined anywhere; the most popular point is the village of **Rosenallis**. The route takes the walker past deep glens, rocky outcrops, waterfalls and lofty summits.

WALKING FESTIVAL

There's an annual Walks Festival from late June to mid July, more information from ☎ (0502) 61900, www.laoistourism.ie.

On Water

BOATING & CRUISING

With the Grand Canal and River Barrow running through it, Laois is a great place to start exploring by water.

Based on the Grand Canal at Vicarstown, the family-owned cruiser rental company, **Barrowline**, offers vacations on board barges. ☎ (0502) 25888; www.barrowline.ie.

FISHING

The **Barrow** flows past the historic towns of Mountmellick and Portlarlington and, downstream of Monasterevin, there are many spots offering solitude. The **Nore** meanders across Laois before turning south to join up with the Barrow at their common estuary. It is noted for trout, salmon and pike.

Around **Durrow**, and farther downstream, some of the best salmon and trout angling may be found, and tributaries of both the Barrow and the Nore provide very good trout angling.

The Barrow Branch of the **Grand Canal**, including the picturesque Vicarstown, in the east of the county, has good stocks of bream, tench, hybrids, pike and perch.

Granstown Lake, Ballacolla, which is in a nature reserve, provides stillwater fishing, and is open from April to October. **Rathadaire Lake** offers good coarse fishing in picturesque surroundings, while **Ballyfin Lake**, near Mountrath, has pike, tench and rudd. **Mass Lough** and **Gills Pond** at Ballinakill are two small lakes in a lovely setting. **Templemore Lake** is in the town park, with good pike, tench and

rudd angling. **Little Bog Lake** at the Heath, Portlaoise, contains good stocks of rudd and pike.

BAIT SHOPS

The Tackle Shop, Mountrath. ☎ (0502) 32162
The Vicarstown Inn. ☎ (0502) 25189

ANGLING PERMITS

***River Barrow*:**

- **Victor Cox**, The Square, Mountmellick, ☎ (0502) 24107
- **Lawlor's**, The Square, Durrow, ☎ (0502) 36234
- **Finlay's Bar**, Bracklone St., Portarlington, ☎ (0502) 23173
- **Portarlington Auto Parts**, Upper Main St., ☎ (0502) 23456
- **Fisherman's Inn**, Ballybrittas, ☎ (0502) 26488
- **Harrison's Shop**, The Square, Stradbally, (0502) 25359

***River Nore*:**

- **Tom Watkins**, 6 Fintans Park, Mountrath, ☎ (0502) 32540
- **The Tackle Shop**, Mountrath, ☎ (0502) 32162
- **Dunne's Hardware Store**, Abbeyleix, ☎ (0502) 31440
- **Lawlor's**, The Square, Durrow, ☎ (0502) 36234
- **The Late & Early Shop**, Rathdowney, ☎ (0502) 46340

On Horseback

The Laois landscape is very suitable for trekking and there are a number of equestrian centers in the county.

The **Castlewood Equestrian Centre**, Durrow, ☎ (0502) 36551.

Kerr Equestrian Activities, Cremorgan, Timahoe, offers treks along mapped routes, plus hourly and daily excursions. ☎ (0502) 27162.

Fossey Mountain Springs, near Timahoe, offers treks through hilly and wooded countryside. ☎ (0502) 36527.

Portlaoise Equestrian Centre has an indoor jumping arena and a cross-country course. ☎ (0502) 60880.

The Equestrian Activity Centre, Mount Briscoe, Daingean, ☎ (0506) 53046.

The **Slieve Bloom Trail Equestrian Centre**, based at Clononeen, Borris-in-Ossory, takes riders on a trek to the mountains, and also offers lessons. ☎ (0505) 41298.

A HORSE-DRAWN EXCURSION

You can take to the roads in one of the **Kilvahan Horse Drawn Caravans**. This is a family-run business. You spend a night at their Georgian farmstead before meeting your horse, learning how to look after him and heading off. ☎ (0502) 27048.

◆ Golf

Abbeyleix Golf Club was founded in 1895 on the Ballyroan road, just outside the town. The course has a lovely backdrop, with the Cullenagh Hills to the north and the Slieve Bloom Mountains to the west. ☎ (0502) 31305.

- ***The Heath Golf Club**, near Portlaoise, has one of the few courses in Western Europe over open heath. Golf was played here from the 1880s and the club founded in 1930. The course incorporates three natural lakes and has rough heather and gorse furze features. ☎ (0502) 46533.*
- *The **Portlaoise Golf Course**, Cork Road, Meelick, has a variety of hazards, including water features, sand bunkers and mature trees. It's also home to wildlife, including mallard ducks and pheasant. ☎ (0502) 61557.*
- ***Rathdowney**, with the Devil's Bit to the west and the Slieve Blooms to the north, has a beautiful backdrop. Founded in 1930, it was extended to 18 holes in the 1990s. ☎ (0505) 46170.*
- ***Portarlington's** course was founded in 1909 on part of an old estate, and is bordered by the River Barrow. Players often see pheasant, ducks and other wildlife. ☎ (0502) 23044.*
- *The **Mountrath Club** course, founded in 1929, has the River Nore meandering through it. ☎ (0502) 32558.*

◆ Where to Stay & Eat

For accommodations pricing guide, see page 142.

Hotels

Castle Durrow Hotel, is a member of Blue Book and of Historic Hotels Europe. Excellent value, with rates from $$$, special offers available. ☎ (0502) 36555; fax 36559; info@castledurrow.com; www.castledurrow.com.

☆☆ The **Hibernian Hotel**, Abbeyleix, was built by the Viscount de Vesci in 1840 and now incorporates two other houses from the same period. It has 10 bedrooms, an excellent bar serving food all day, and a very good restaurant open in the evenings. Sunday lunch is particularly popular as it's such an excellent value. $$. ☎ (0502) 31252; fax 31888.

The **Gandon Inn** was designed by the famous architect it's named after, to serve guests visiting nearby Emo Court, and claims to be Ireland's oldest family inn, though that's difficult to confirm. In its Custom House Bar food is served from 7 am to 10 pm, including traditional Irish breakfast and snacks, and its restaurant is open from noon to 10pm. ☎ (0502) 26622; fax 46781.

In Portlaoise, there is the **Kitchen and Food Hall**, Hynds Square, just off Main Street, open Monday to Saturday, 9:30 am to 5:30 pm; and from 7:30 pm Thursday to Saturday. Modern, Irish and Mediterranean dishes. ☎ (0502) 62061.

Bellamy's Restaurant, on Main Street, Portlaoise, is open seven days, from 10:30 am to 9:30 pm, serving traditional Irish cuisine, including steaks, plus vegetarian choices. ☎ (0502) 22303.

Hostel

The traditional **Farran Farm Hostel**, off R434, northwest of Ballacolla, Portlaoise, is open all year. ☎ (0502) 34032; www.farmhostel.com, info@farmhostel.com.

County Westmeath

Although it's an inland county, Westmeath is great for fishing and other water-based activities, as its central area is flat, with bogland and plenty of lakes. The largest lake is **Lough Ree** in the

west, which is dotted with little islands, and in the north there's **Lough Sheelin**, which spreads over to Co. Cavan. **Lough Derravaragh** is said to be one of the lakes where the Children of Lír, transformed by an evil spell into swans, lived for hundreds of years. Other lakes include Lough Ennell, Lough Owel, Lough Iron and Lough Lene, Brittas and Bane.

In the northern part of the county, drumlins, small hills with steep sides formed by melting glaciers at the end of the Ice Age, dot the landscape. A line of low hills marks the county's southern boundary.

The seat of the High King of Ireland, 200 years before St. Patrick brought Christianity here in the 5th century, was near Mullingar, and there are also lots of early monastic sites around the county. Signs of the Normans, who arrived here around 1170, can also be seen in numerous mottes-and-baileys. The county town is **Mullingar**, but the largest is **Athlone**, which straddles the River Shannon and is half in Co. Roscommon.

MOTTES & BAILEYS

A motte is a mound, usually artificial, with a ditch around it, on which early castles were built. A bailey is the external wall surrounding a castle or keep. The most famous of the latter in the world is the Old Bailey, the London Criminal Court.

◆ Getting Here

Main routes to Athlone are N6-N4 from Dublin (78 miles/126 km) or from Galway (58 miles/93 km); N55-N3-N54-N12-A3-M1 from Belfast (136 miles/219 km); N6-N62-N8-N25 from Cork (136 miles/219 km).

◆ Tourist Information

Fáilte Ireland's main Tourist Office is in the historic Market House, in Market Square, Mullingar Open June to September, Monday to Friday, 9:30 am to 5:30 pm, closed 1-2 pm. ☎ (044) 48650.

East Coast and Midlands Tourism is based on Dublin Road, Mullingar, and open all year. ☎ (044) 48761; www.eastcoastmidlands.ie.

Westmeath Tourism Council, Presentation House, Mullingar, ☎ (044) 48571, publishes excellent guides, including *The Fore Trail, The Belvedere Trail, The Glasson Trail: Goldsmith Country*, all routes suitable for bikes as well as cars. Other guides are *Angling in Westmeath, Golf in Westmeath* and *Dining out in Westmeath*.

Athlone Chamber of Commerce, on Jolly Mariner Marina, open all year. ☎ (090) 647-3173.

Athlone Castle, open April-October. ☎ (090) 649-4630

Heritage Centre, Old Schoolhouse, Glasson, open all year. ☎ (090) 648-5677.

Fore Abbey Coffee Shop, open daily, June-September, and Sundays all year. ☎ (044) 61780; forecoffeeshop@oceanfree.net

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

The genealogy office for the county is in the **Dún na Sí Heritage Centre**, Knockdomney, Moate. ☎ (090) 648-1183; fax 648-1661; dunnasimoate@eircom.net.

◆ Sightseeing

Athlone

Athlone, 28 miles (45 km) southwest of Mullingar, is on the N6/R390. It's not just the largest town in Westmeath, it's also the biggest on the River Shannon, and is a very interesting and attractive place to visit. Pause on the bridge and watch all the activity on the Shannon, with colorful cruisers and boats moving up and down.

Athlone Castle

The town straddles the border between two counties, and is also in two different provinces – Leinster (Westmeath) and Connacht (Roscommon). Because of its strategic location on a major crossing-point of the largest Irish river, the town has played an important role in the country's history. You can find out about it at **Athlone Castle**, dating from the 13th century, which dominates the town. John Count

McCormack, the famous tenor, came from Athlone, and you can learn about him there too. There is a café and restaurant, and a tourist information office in the visitor centre. Open May to October, Monday to Friday, 9:30 am to 5:30 pm; July and August open Saturday, same hours; closed 1-2 pm. ☎ (090) 649-2912; fax 647-9020; www.athlone.ie.

Farm machinery, vintage and classic cars and trucks are displayed at **An Dún Transport & Heritage Museum** at Doon, Ballinahown, near Athlone, and there's also a model railway. The coffee bar is quaint and relaxing. ☎ (090) 643-0106.

Also near Athlone is the **Derryglad Folk Museum**, run by the Finneran family, where you can see horse-drawn machinery restored to working order, and other interesting items, including butter-making equipment. Open May to September, Monday-Saturday, 10 am-6 pm, Sunday from 2 pm. ☎ (090) 648-8192.

Mullingar

Mullingar, the county capital, stands on the River Brosna, with the Royal Canal circling it. It's an attractive place to explore, as many of its streets date from the 18th and 19th centuries. You'll find it hard not to notice the **Roman Catholic Cathedral**, built in 1936 in Renaissance style, as its scale is imposing. Nearby is the **Ecclesiastical Museum**, covering the history of Catholicism from Penal days when it was outlawed. ☎ (044) 48338.

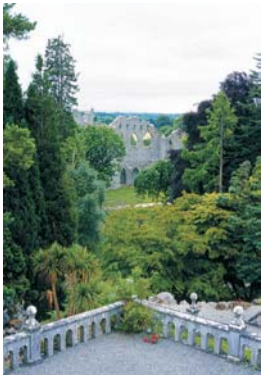
Mullingar was a garrison town and there's a **Military Museum** in the old Guard Room at Columb Barracks, which includes exhibits about the IRA, the War of Independence, and The Civil War, plus ancient longboats, found in nearby lakes, that look a bit like canoes.

At the **Market House Museum** you learn about a real eccentric named Adolphus Cooke, who did many strange things. He was so convinced he'd be reincarnated as a bee that he arranged to be buried in a tomb shaped like a beehive, which you can see in the graveyard at Cooksborough Church, eight miles (13 km) east of the town.

If more contemporary activities interest you, the **Mullingar Arts Centre** has a program of exhibitions, concerts, and drama all year. ☎ (044) 47777.

The stadium at Mullingar has **greyhound races** on Tuesday and Saturday nights all year. There's a restaurant and two bars at the stadium. ☎ (044) 48348; www.mullingargreyhoundstadium.com.

Three miles (4.8 km) from Mullingar on the N52 road to Tullamore is **Belvedere House Gardens and Park**. In its grounds is the largest folly in Ireland, known as the **Jealous Wall**. Special events areheld here throughout the year, including musical performances and historical reenactments. At the Falconry Centre visitors learn about birds of prey. Open year-round; days and hours vary by season, so call ahead for current information. ☎ (044) 49060; info@belvedere-house.ie; www.belvedere-house.ie.



Jealous Wall

Touring Routes

Travelling by car or bike, you can follow three signposted routes around Westmeath. You can rent bikes from a number of outlets, including **Buckley Cycles**, Garden Vale, Athlone, ☎ (090) 647-8989.

Starting in Mullingar, the **Fore Trail** takes in the northern section of the county, passing through pretty villages, with marvelous views over lakes. The **Belvedere Trail** covers the southern part of the county and takes you to **Belvedere House** (see above), **Lilliput** (named after Jonathan Swift's fictional land), and **Locke's Distillery Museum** at Kilbeggan. The museum, at the junction of the N52/N6, is housed in the building where whiskey was made from 1757 to 1954. You're taken on a guided tour explaining its history and the process involved. There is also a tourist services center and a restaurant. Open year-round. April to October, 9 am to 6 pm; November to March, 10 am to 4 pm; closed Christmas week. ☎ (0506) 32134; www.lockesdistillerymuseum.com, lockesmuseum@iol.ie.

The N6 route south from Mullingar to Kilbeggan is narrow and windy, but take your time and enjoy the wonderful countryside. En route is **Delvin**, with a motte built by Hugh de Lacy in 1181, and nearby the ruins of the 13th-century castle of the Nugent family, the Earls of Westmeath.

The **Glasson Trail** is the third route; start it at Athlone, then go to Glasson and from there travel around Goldsmith Country.

Goldsmith Country

This area of South Westmeath and South Longford is named after one of Ireland's leading poets, playwrights and novelists, **Oliver Goldsmith** (1728-1774). He was born in Pallas, Co. Longford, and moved to Lissoy, near Glasson in Co. Westmeath, when he was two. Lissoy became "Sweet Auburn" in his best-known poem.

St. Fechin's Monastery at Fore

If you visit only one of the county's historic sites, make it Fore, which is not well known even among the Irish. Fore is a tiny village near Castlepollard and Lough Lene in the northeast corner of the county, where there are the ruins of a **monastery** established by St. Fechin in the seventh century. Above them on the hillside is the **Anchorite's Church**, in use by hermits until 300 years ago. There's a stone tablet remembering the last of them, Patrick Beglan, who lived here until 1616. Science probably gives rational explanations for the following, known as "The Seven Wonders of Fore":

- Water will not boil
- Wood will not burn
- Water flows uphill
- The monastery is built on a bog
- The mill has no race
- The last hermit is encased in a stone
- The stone was raised by St. Fechin's prayers

There's a restored farmhouse with a coffee shop, information is available, local crafts are for sale, and there's a genealogy service. It's open from 11 am until late every day from June to September and every Sunday year-round. ☎ (044) 61780.

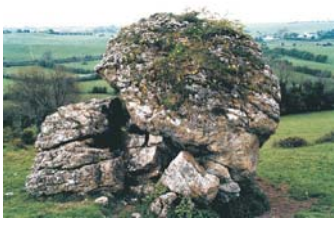
◆ Adventures

On Foot

At Mullingar, there's a sign-posted walking route along the towpath of the **Royal Canal**.

About 10 miles (16 km) southwest of Mullingar is **Uisneach Hill**, "the navel of Ireland," the mythological seat of the High Kings before they moved to Tara, Co. Meath. Whether this is true or not is uncertain, as the only evidence were thick ashes, which show it was the site of fire festivals.

At the top of the hill is the ancient boulder, the **Catstone**, known also as the "Stone of Divisions," marking the geographical center of the four ancient provinces of Ireland – Leinster, Munster, Connacht and Ulster. The hill is 250 feet high and worth climbing for the view of 20 of the 32 counties.



Catstone

In the northwest of the county near Finea is **Mullaghmeen**, the largest planted beech forest in Europe, covering 1,000 acres. Other trees, including sycamore, oak and ash, also flourish. It's a peaceful place for a picnic or walk, with marvelous views, especially from White Hill (894 feet/264 m), the highest point in the whole county. There are walks varying in length here, and there are also walks along the lakeshore at **Donore** near Multyfarnham and at **Portlick** near Glasson.

North of Mullingar, between Loughs Lene and Derravaragh, is Castlepollard and **Tullynally Castle**, which has been owned by the Earls of Longford, the Pakenhams, since the 17th century. Its name means "Hill of the Swan." The gardens are open daily from May to August. They cover nearly 30 acres and are wonderful, with two lakes, a grotto, walled gardens and woodland – a great place to walk.

Tullynally Castle

The present owners, Valerie and Thomas Pakenham, added a Chinese garden and a Tibetan garden, with waterfalls and streams. Both of them are authors, and he's had a bestseller with a marvelous book about trees. The **Gardens Craft Shop and Café** are open weekends in May and daily from June 1 to August 31, from 2 to 6 pm. Tullynally is one of the largest castles in the country that is still a family home, and it is open only to pre-booked groups; www.tullynallycastle.com; valeriepakenham@eircom.net.

Ballinlough Castle

Near Clonmellon on the N52 is **Ballinlough Castle**. Take a walk through the walled gardens and lakeside pleasure grounds, open May to September, weekends and bank holidays only, noon to 6 pm; there is also a coffee shop. ☎ (046) 943-3234.

On Water

BOATING & CRUISING

There are a number of companies based at Athlone or nearby, renting out cruisers and running trips.

Athlone Cruisers is based at the Jolly Mariner Marina in town, and is the longest established cruiser company in the country. They rent luxury self-drive cruisers and run trips on Lough Ree; ☎ (090) 647-2892; fax 647-4386; acl@wmeathtc.iol.ie; www.iol.ie/wmeathtc/acl.

Waveline Cruisers is based at Killenure Point, Glasson, near Athlone, and rents boats for cruising vacations, the smallest a two-berth. ☎ (090) 648-5711; fax 648-5716; info@waveline.ie.

Lough Ree Cruisers are based at Mucknagh Point, Glasson, in the middle of the Shannon-Erne Waterway. Head office: ☎/ (01) 492-3150; www.loughcreecruisers.com.

You can also cruise the Shannon on a replica Viking boat from Athlone to Clonmacnoise, or cruise Lough Ree, where the Vikings plundered and pillaged, with live commentary and refreshments on board. Trips daily, from **Strand Fishing Tackle Shop**. ☎ (090) 647-9277.

If sailing interests you, there are two centers near Athlone – the **Lough Ree Yacht Club**, Ballyglass, Coosan, Athlone, info@lryc.ie, www.lryc.ie**,** and the **Wineport Sailing Centre**, Glasson ☎ (090) 648-5190, plus another on Lough Owel, north of Mullingar. Ask about them at tourist offices.

Near Castletown Geoghegan are **Lilliput** and **Jonanthan Swift Park**, both named to honor Jonathan Swift, author of *Gulliver's Travels* and frequent visitor to the county. The park is the site of one of the county's two inland Blue Flag beaches, Lilliput Loch Ennell (the

other is The Cut, on Lough Lene, Collinstown); it's a great place to swim. There's also an 18-hole golf course, ☎ (044) 26457, and an outdoor adventure center, ☎ (044) 26789.

SWIMMING

You can go for a swim at the **Athlone Regional Sports Centre**, Ballymahon Road. It's open daily but public hours vary; phone in advance for schedule. ☎ (090) 647-0975; info@athlonesportscentre.ie; www.athlonesportscentre.ie.

FISHING

With so many rivers, lakes and stretches of canal, the county is a paradise for anyone interested in fishing. For brown trout, head for Loughs Ennell, Lene, Sheelin and Owel, or to Loughs Glore, Bane, Mount Dalton, White Lake or the River Brosna.

Pike and **coarse anglers** will enjoy Loughs Ree and Derravaragh, rivers Inny, Shannon, and the Royal Canal.

Carp fishing is available at Gaulmoylestown and Ballinafid lakes. You can get expert advice and rent equipment and boats.

There's an annual **International Angling Festival** at Athlone in early July.

LEARN THE ART OF FLY FISHING

The **Traditional Lough Style Angling Centre** is five miles (eight km) south of Mullingar on the shores of Lough Ennell and is in an idyllic setting surrounded by woodland. It's the ideal place to learn the art of fly fishing. They also rent boats and organize ghillies (guides). Open Feb 23 to December 31, dawn to dusk, boat or ghillie rental, fully accessible to disabled. ☎ (044) 49086.

RENTING BOATS & EQUIPMENT

Doolans Boat Hire, Lough Owel, just north of Mullingar off the N4. Trout lake (season March to mid October) fleet of fiberglass boats, plus ghillie service. ☎ (044) 42085; michaeldoolan26@hotmail.com.

Lilliput Boat Hire, Jonathan Swift Park, is also on Lough Ennell, near Tyrellspass, Kilbeggan and the N6. You can rent boats, life jackets, fishing equipment by the hour, day or evening, and get fuel and permits here. ☎ (044) 26167.

At **Lough Derravaragh Boat Hire**, Donore Shore, Multyfarnham, you can rent boats, engines, fishing gear, and get packed lunches if you wish. ☎ (044) 71500; camping@iol.ie.

ANGLING TRIPS

At the southern tip of Lough Derravaragh is **Crookedwood**, where you can embark on guided fishing trips or an angling safari on a fully equipped 16-foot Lund Laker American pike fishing boat. Contact Alan Broderick, ☎ (044) 72015; alan@irelandpike.com; www.irelandpike.com. There's an early Christian site nearby, plus the well-preserved 14th-century stone-roofed church of **Taughmon**.

FIONN & THE FIANNA

Crookedwood gets its intriguing name from the Irish *Cnoc an Bhodaigh*, or "the hill of the clown," dating back to the Fenian tales – the ancient sagas of *Fionn and the Fianna*, one of the great bodies of ancient Irish lore.

"Fionn MacCumail was leader of the Fian (Fenians)– a great standing army of daring warriors, whose duty was to carry out the mandates of the high kin – 'To uphold justice and put down injustice, on the part of the kings and lords of Ireland and to guard the harbors from foreign invaders,' in the time of Cormac MacArt. Fionn lived and died in the third century of the Christian Era.

The best stories of the Fian are in the poems of Oisin, the son of Fionn, the chief bard of the fian, in the *Agallamh na Seanorach – Colloquy of the Ancients of Olden Time*." (From *www.luminarium.org/mythology/ireland)*

On Horseback

You can improve your skill at riding and show-jumping, or try trekking or cross-country at the **Mullingar Equestrian Centre** on the Athlone Road. They offer residential, short-break and one-day programs. ☎ (044) 48331; info@mullingarequestrian.com; www.mullingarequestrian.com.

Near Athlone there are riding facilities, including:

Derwins, Auburn, Moate Road, ☎ (090) 647-4460

Kiltoom Stables, ☎ (090) 648-9511

Mannions, Kilkenny West, Glasson, ☎ (090) 648-5781

At **Ladestown Riding Stables**, just outside Mullingar on the Kilbeggan Road, you can go on accompanied rides around Lough Ennell or into the woodlands; or you can take lessons. They have all-weather facilities, show-jumping and cross-country fences. ☎ (044) 48218; fax 48253; ladestown@eircom.net.

Horseracing

Kilbeggan racecourse has evening events between May and September. ☎ (0506) 32176; kilbegganracecourse@eircom.net; www.kilbegganraces.com.

◆ Golf

There are a number of courses, all in scenic locations. The **Athlone Golf Club** is on Hodson Bay, ☎ (090) 649-2073.

The **Ballinlough Castle Golf Club**, Clonmellon, is in the grounds of the castle that dates from the early 1600s. The gardens, open to the public, have been restored, and there are lovely lakeside walks and a tea room. ☎ (044) 64544; www.ballinloughcastle.com; golf@ballinloughcastle.com.

Delvin Castle Golf Course, Clonyn, is on the N52 Mullingar-to-Dundalk road on the grounds of two castles, in mature parkland that includes 100-year-old cypresses. ☎ (044) 64315.

Moate Golf Course is a mile north of the town of Moate. ☎ (090) 648-1271.

Mount Temple Golf Club is four miles (6.4 km) from Moate and five miles (eight km) from Athlone off the N6. ☎ (090) 648-1841.

The **Glasson Golf and Country Club** is six miles (10 km) north of Athlone on the N55. See also below. ☎ (090) 648-5120; info@glassongolf.ie.

◆ Where to Stay & Eat

For accommodations pricing guide, see page 142.

Guesthouses

☆☆☆ **An Tintain Guesthouse**, Multyfarnham, is in a very attractive historic building, originally a stone-cut forge, on the riverside in this pretty village. It's not only a very comfortable and beautifully furnished guesthouse, it's also a restaurant, and known for its good

food. Open year-round except December 23-31. $. ☎ (044) 71411; fax 71434; www.antintain.info; antintain@ireland.com.

☆☆☆ **Hodson Bay Hotel** has an absolutely idyllic setting on the shore of Lough Ree next to Athlone Golf Club. It has 133 bedrooms, many with lovely views, little sandy beaches, and there's a marina with cruiser berthing, so you can watch the boats come and go. There are also daily boat trips available in summer. The **L'Escale Restaurant** serves fresh Irish produce, and there's also the lively **Waterfront Bar & Buttery**. $$ (with special breaks available). ☎ (090) 644-2000; fax 644-2020; info@hodsonbayhotel.com; www.hodsonbayhotel.com.

☆ The **Newbury Hotel**, Mullingar, is family-run and was recently refurbished. Breakfast is served until 11 am and meals are available every day until 7:30 pm. In its basement is **Dante**, an Italian restaurant very popular with locals, open daily from 5 pm to 11:30 pm. There's live music on Thursday, Friday and Saturday night in the main bar. $$. ☎ (044) 42888; 44618; www.thenewburyhotel.com newburyinfo@eircom.net.

The Prince Of Wales Hotel, right in the center of Athlone, offers 46 well-equipped guest rooms furnished in an elegant contemporary style. There's been a hotel here for almost 200 years; this one opened in 2004. Food is available all day, including snacks and a carvery lunch, and there's a choice of four bars. Meals at the **Corvus Restaurant** are prepared using local produce, and are reasonably priced. There's also a night club called **Karma**. From $$, special offers available. ☎ (090) 647-6666; fax 649-1750; info@theprinceofwales.ie www.theprinceofwales.ie.

House & Cottage Rentals

Ladestown House stood on a site that has been occupied for at least 2,500 years. Its ruins have been transformed into a terrace garden, and its well-preserved fine stone courtyards into stables (see previous page). There's one cottage available to rent. It sleeps five, has a traditional interior with open fire and central heating. It has wonderful parkland views and overlooks a lake. ☎ (044) 48218; fax 48253; ladestown@eircom.net.

The **Multyfarnham Holiday Village** is a group of 14 modern houses, each with three bedrooms, and on site there are two tennis courts.

The village is quiet, but has two pubs, a restaurant, supermarket and butcher. It's also close to Lough Derravaragh. ☎ (044) 71359; fax 71342; info@irishcottageholidays.com.

Carnakilla Cottages are on the shores of the River Shannon and Lough Ree in a tranquil setting, yet less than a mile (5 km) from Glasson, where there are two pubs, three restaurants and a large supermarket. Each of the four cottages sleeps six. They are constructed of native timber, and have central heating and a solid-fuel stove. Available year round. ☎ (090) 648-5389; 648-5953; www.shannon-holidays.com, info@shannon-holidays.com.

Hostel, Camping & RV Park

The **Lough Ree Lodge Hostel** is on Dublin Road, Athlone, and is open from mid-May to mid-September. ☎ (090) 647-6738; www.athlonehostel.ie.

☆☆ **Lough Ree East Caravan and Camping Park** is two miles (3.2 km) outside Athlone at Ballykeeran off the N55 road to Cavan. It's on the shore of Lough Ree, with its own jetty and boats for hire, ideal for angling, windsurfing, sailing and canoeing. It's open April 1-September 30. ☎ (090) 647-8561; athlonecamping@eircom.net; www.athlonecamping.com.

County Longford

Longford is an inland county lying in the basin of the River Shannon, which, with Lough Ree, forms its western boundary. It's one of the smallest counties on the island, ranking 30th out of 32, and its landscape is flat with rolling bogland, pastures and wetland, dotted with lakes and crossed by rivers.

Co. Longford is one of the most unspoiled areas in Ireland, almost untouched by mass development, so it's of great interest to the ecotourist for its flora and fauna. Its extensive waterways also mean that there are wonderful angling and watersport locations.

Among its historic monuments are standing stones and a section of the **Black Pig's Dyke**, an ancient boundary formation, near Granard. The route of the Táin passed through the county and is now followed by walkers and cyclists.

The county hosts a number of annual events, including the **ESB Lough Ree Environmental Summer School and Arts Festival** (July), the **Goldsmith Summer School** in Ballymahon (June), and **angling competitions** in Arva and Lanesborough every August and September. Contact Longford Tourism, below, for details.

Its county capital and largest town is also called **Longford**, and other main towns are **Ballymahon**, **Lanesborough** and **Granard**.

◆ Getting Here

Longford is served by the major routes N4 from Dublin (76 miles/122 km); N4-N55-N54-N2-A3-M1 from Belfast (123 miles/198 km); N6 from Galway (67 miles/108 km).

It's on the railway route from Dublin to Sligo. **Longford Town Station**, ☎ (043) 45208. It is also on bus routes.

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

For information regarding your ancestry contact **Longford Roots Research Centre** at 1 Church Street, Longford; ☎ (043) 41235; www.longfordroots.ie.

◆ Tourist Information

Longford Tourism, open Monday to Saturday, 9:30 am to 5:30 pm in main tourist season. ☎ (043) 46566.

◆ Sightseeing

Longford Town

The county town is on the N4, the east-west route linking Dublin and Sligo, where it meets the N5, the route north-south. Longford's name comes from the Irish for "the fort or stronghold of the O'Farrells" and was named after the local chieftain, who built a fortress here in 1400. The family ruled the area for 600 years, at one stage owning seven castles in the southern part of the county.

The town grew along the south bank of the **River Camlin** and developed as a gateway to the northwestern part of the country. The British built barracks here in 1700, which led to further expansion. Approaching it from the Sligo direction, you come to a broad tree-lined avenue with houses set back from the road. This is where the British

Army officers lived, and you'll see paddocks where their horses grazed.

Dominating the town is the 19th-century gray limestone **Cathedral of St. Mel**, named after a bishop who lived here around 480, and whose crosier can be seen in the museum behind it.

You can visit the **Longford County Museum** on Main Street, which is open to the public during the summer months. Among its displays are collections of domestic, historic and agricultural interest, as well as archival and General Sean MacEoin material. Genealogical service is provided. In the middle of town on Great Water Street there are a number of 18th-century buildings, including **St. John's Church of Ireland** (ca. 1760), the **Court House** and the **Longford Arms Hotel** (1807). With the arrival of the Royal Canal in 1830 and the railway in 1855, the eastern side of town developed as the main center of commerce and industry. There's a lovely landscaped park, **The Mall**, on the riverbank, which covers 20 acres and is ideal for a walk or picnic. Nearby is a **Sports and Leisure Centre**, where you can enjoy a swim or workout.

Iniscleraun Slab
Longford Museum

Longford is a busy shopping town, and a pleasant place to visit, with friendly people. You won't see many tourists, apart from those interested in angling or enjoying its quiet countryside.

Carriglas Manor, close to Longford, has a charming woodland garden nestling between the historic family-owned mansion and the magnificent stableyards. At this printing the Manor is closed to the public until further notice; updated information may be availale at (043) 45165 or www.longford.ie/community.

The **Corlea Trackway Centre** is near Kenagh village, off the R397 south of Longford. This is the remains of an ancient bog road (or trackway) built in 148 BC. It's the largest of its kind discovered in Europe, and involved the felling of 200 oaks and laying them across Ringderry bog to reach Derryadd drumlin. In the Visitor Centre you see a section of the original trackway, as well as other displays. The center is surrounded by 30 acres of raised bog, which is a nature reserve you can visit on a guided tour. Wear sensible clothing and

shoes. There's a restaurant/tea room and picnic area. Open April to September, 10 am to 6 pm. ☎ (043) 22386.

At Ardagh, off the N4 Dublin road from Longford Town, you can see the restored **Fetherston Stables**. They're attached to what was a stately home, and are on a grand scale, retaining the original horse feeding and ventilation systems.

Off the R198 is **Ballinamuck** and its **Battlefield Centre**. Housed in a former barracks, it's a lively exhibition that explains "the Year of the French" and the Battle of Ballinamuck in 1798. After that, you can visit the site of the battle. Open all year; call for times. ☎ (043) 24848.

AN UNUSUAL SOUVENIR

Bogwood is found in peatland or bogs in Ireland, where it's been preserved for 5,000 years. Michael and Kevin Casey, Barley Harbor, Newtowncashel, create beautiful sculptures from this wood, and in their workshop you can learn about the process. Call ☎ (043) 25297; www.bogwood.net.

Granard

Granard Motte

Granard is the second-largest town in Longford. It's on the N55 route from the Midlands to the northern counties, surrounded by beautiful forests and lakes, including Lough Gowna.

Its name has many meanings, including "'The Hill of the Sun," "The Hill of the Grain" or "Ugly Height" – all because of its most memorable feature, the great Norman earthwork or *motte*, the largest in Ireland, which rises up at the west end of the main street.

This became the site for a castle built in 1199 by Richard Tuite who had been granted the lands by Hugh de Lacy. Neither castle nor any medieval building has survived, and Granard today is a Georgian town, which was laid out during the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Ballymahon

Ballymahon is in the south of Longford on the N55, along the banks of the River Inny, which enters Lough Ree on the River Shannon, three miles (4.8 km) west of the town. An angling center these days, it's attractive, with a wide main street and late Georgian buildings.

The name comes from the Irish *Baile Math na* , or the town of Mahon, a Gaelic Chieftain who defeated O'Rourke of Leitrim in battle nearby at Shrule, which in Irish means "river of blood."

John Keegan Casey (1846-1870), who was involved with the Fenians and wrote ballads and poems, including the well-known *The Rising of the Moon*, lived in Ballymahon. The poet and playwright Oliver Goldsmith also spent a lot of time here and there's a statue of him in the middle of town.

Edgeworthstown

Edgeworthstown, eight miles (13 km) east of Longford, is just over the border from Westmeath on the N4. It's named after the family who first settled here in 1583, and Richard Lovell Edgeworth and his daughter Maria were its most interesting members.

Richard (1744-1817) invented an early bicycle, a carriage powered by a sail, and a vehicle that could cross bogs on a primitive form of caterpillar treads, not to mention a central heating system for the Pakenhams at Tullynally Castle, Co. Westmeath. He also built a road on his estate that was ahead of its time, as it had a camber and top blinding layer (camber is the slope and the blinding layer is part of the process of road making still used today).

He founded a school where Catholics and Protestants learned together, again ahead of his time; he also believed girls should be educated along with boys, and that science and engineering were as important as the classics and the arts. He wrote several books on education with his daughter Maria, who is best known today as the author of the novel *Castle Rackrent* (1800).

Lanesborough

Lanesborough is at the northern tip of the broad expanse of Lough Ree, and was named after the family of one of the heroes on the English side at the Battle of Kinsale (fought in Co. Cork in 1601), who was later given lands here as a reward for his loyal services.

The town straddles the River Shannon and two provinces, spilling over onto the Roscommon side, which is in Connaught, and Leinster. In 1140 Turlough O'Connor, King of Connaught, marched his armies through the fords here and, less than 100 years later, the Norman Lord, Walter de Lacy, fortified the river crossing. You can see the **castle remains**, covered in ivy. Just north of the town is **Cloontuskert Abbey**, founded by Saints Brendan and Faithleach in 520 AD.

◆ Adventures

On Foot & On Wheels

The **Táin Trail**, which originally was a short waymarked way in Co. Louth, has become a much longer cycling and walking route. It crosses into Co. Longford at the Shannon fords at Tarmonbarry. Between there and what's now Longford Town was Trego or "the plain of the spears," where Queen Maeve's army was attacked by the Celtic war-spirit Nemain. After an overnight stay at Granard, they carried on towards Crosskeel in Co. Meath and then on to the Cooley Peninsula.

Near Granard is **Derrycassan Wood** on the shore of Lough Gowna, with a choice of walks, along the river and by the lakeshore, through the lovely native flora and fauna.

At **Ballymahon** there are six miles (10 km) of landscaped walkways along the Royal Canal, with cut stone bridges, old store house buildings and loughs adding to the pleasure. Also nearby are forest trails in **Newcastle Woods** and on the banks of the Inny River.

On Water

RIVERS & CANALS

At Ballymahon, the **Inny Kayak Club** is based along the river from Inny Park. The club has qualified instructors who teach seniors and juniors, young and old how to canoe.

Richmond Harbor is on the **River Camlin**, close to where it meets the **River Shannon**, and is connected by the 46th lock with the end of the Royal Canal. The **Richmond Inn** used to be a flax mill and the private houses along the harbor were offices. The flax was transported by barge from here to Dublin on the canal. Passengers also em-

barked here in bad times to begin their long journeys to North America and elsewhere.

The Royal Canal, built between 1790-1817, carried passengers from this area to Dublin until the arrival of the railway led to its decline. It continued to be used to transport goods until 1955. Twenty years ago this and other Irish canals were handed over to the State-run Office of Public Works, and now it is navigable between Abbeyshrule and Dublin.

FISHING

Ballymahon is popular as an angling center, in the middle of some of the very best game and coarse fishing in the Midlands, among them the River Inny, Lough Drum, Lough Ree, and the Royal Canal. To its north is Lanesborough, and a little farther upstream is the highly acclaimed game fishing at Tarmon Weir. After that is Lough Forbes, an excellent summer and winter venue, known to produce huge pike.

The Camlin Club continuously restocks reaches of the **Shannon** and the **Camlin rivers** with brown trout and the old **Longford reservoir** with both brown and rainbow trout. There's also the stocked trout water at **Mount Dalton Lough** nearby.

Lanesborough is also renowned for its excellent fishing. Near the peat-fueled power station is what's known as the "hot water stretch," which attracts fishermen from Europe and beyond.

There are seven lakes in the **Dromard** area, some straddling the border between Longford and Cavan, which are popular with both locals and visitors.

Ballymahon has several waterways that have a variety of fish, ranging from bream, trout, roach, and hybrids to perch and pike. Within a mile of Ballinamuck are Lough Sallagh, Fearglass and Cloncoose Lakes, as well as the River Shannon nearby. **Corbeagh Lake** is small and in a secluded setting, about three miles (4.8 km) from Ballinalee.

The **Inny River** near Abbeyshrule is another good source of fish, with roach and pike caught throughout the year. In the Abbeylara area, the Inny and **Derragh Lake** are noted for good fishing.

Clondra, where the Royal Canal meets the Shannon, is an angling center, with services available. Contact the Mullingar (Midlands East) tourist office for advice (see page 104 for contact details).

The regional fishery board is the Shannon, ☎ (0509) 21777; info@shannon-fishery-board.ie.

TACKLE SHOPS

J & B Holmes, Main Street, Lanesboro, Co. Longford; ☎ (043) 21491.

Edward Denniston and Company, Centenary Square, Longford, has been in business for more than 70 years, stocking bait, tackle, and everything else needed; ☎ (043) 46345.

BOAT RENTAL

Mark Shields Boat & Engine Hire, Lanesborough, has 19-foot lake boats with outboards for rent on a daily or weekly basis. They can also arrange a ghillie. ☎ (043) 21510/21956.

Try Something Different

ARCHERY

Carmel and Brendan Igoe have restored the walled garden at the **Old Bond Estate**, Killoe, to its former glory, and you can try archery in the forested area around it. ☎ (043) 23327.

IN THE AIR

Abbeyfield, in Abbeyshrule, is a popular destination for light aircraft enthusiasts. There are two clubs based there offering instruction – the **Inny Aero Club**, O'Dea@tinet.ie, ☎ (044) 55266, and **Aero Club 2000**. The Abbeyshrule Air Show, Ireland's longest running airshow, is held annually at the airfield, on the second Sunday of August. The Airshow is an exciting and spectacular occasion and regularly features Aircraft from the Irish Air Corps, US Air Force and some of the best civilian acts in Ireland and the UK.

On Horseback

David Harrison at Mosstown, Kenagh, runs an all-weather equestrian facility so that classes, show-jumping practice and events can be held at any time of year. There's also an outdoor arena. ☎ (043) 22414.

◆ Golf

County Longford Golf Club, Dublin Road, was founded over 100 years ago, and its course is in a pleasant parkland setting, playable year-round. ☎ (043) 46310; fax 47082; colonggolf@eircom.net.

◆ Where to Stay & Eat

Hotels

ACCOMMODATIONS

$ . . . . . under $60
$$. $61-120
$$$. $121-182
$$$$. $183-243
$$$$$. . . . . over $244

☆☆☆ **Annaly Hotel**, Longford, is a boutique-style hotel with a café/bar. It has 30 attractive guestrooms, and a health and fitness center with swimming pool. Food is available from 7:30 am to 9 pm, prepared using the best local produce. Entertainment, including live music – rock, pop, traditional and jazz – Thursday to Sunday, from 9 pm. Very reasonably priced from $ for bed and breakfast. ☎ (043) 42058; fax 43690; www.annalyhotel.ie; annalyhotel@eircom.net.

☆☆☆ **Longford Arms Hotel**, built in 1807, has welcomed guests ever since. In recent years it's been expanded, now with a leisure center and a conference center. It has a coffee shop and a good restaurant, and there are 60 bedrooms. It's in the middle of town, so it's ideal as a base. $$ (with special offers). ☎ (043) 46296; fax 46244; longfordarms@eircom.net; www.longfordarms.ie.

☆☆ **Park House Hotel**, Edgeworthstown, is right in the middle of the town on the N4 and is popular for weddings, conferences, and other events. It's also well known as an entertainment venue, where many top acts have performed. It has 21 comfortable bedrooms, and food is served in its **Oakwood Bar** and in its **restaurant**. $$. ☎ (043) 71325: parkhousehotel@eircom.net; www.trailblazer.ie/parkhousehotel.

☆☆☆ The **Shannonside** is a guesthouse in Tarmonbarry, 5 miles from Longford. The guesthouse caters particularly well to anglers, with facilities including a drying room; boats and bait available. **Keenans** bar and restaurant next door is known for its excellent food and friendliness. Food is available in both bar and restaurant, where

fillet of ostrich is on the menu. Only $ sharing. ☎ (043) 26052; fax 26336; www.keenans.ie, info@keenans.ie.

The **Richmond Inn** is a guesthouse with a restaurant and bar, which overlooks the harbor in picturesque Clondra, just outside Longford Town. It's family-run and friendly, and the food is excellent value. It's popular with locals at lunchtimes and in the evenings. $$. ☎/fax (043) 26126; therichmondinn@eircom.net.

Derryclough Farmhouse, hidden away close to Lough Ree and five miles (eight km) west of Ballymahon, is just one of the welcoming guesthouses in the county. ☎ (043) 22126.

The **Rustic Inn**, Abbeyshrule, on the village street, has the Royal Canal running behind its garden. It's well known for good food and entertainment. You can choose from the bar menu or eat in the large restaurant. The owners have a brochure available listing all the best locations nearby for fishing. ☎ (044) 57424.

The **Longford Caravan & Camping Park**, at Kilmacannon, Newtownforbes, is run by Dianne and Paul Bailey. ☎ (043) 45503.

The Southeast

The Southeast takes in the two inland counties of Carlow and Kilkenny, and the coastal counties of Waterford and Wexford, joined here by Tipperary. Anyone visiting the area cannot fail to appreciate the wonderful and varied scenery and the many opportunities for outdoor activities. There are plenty of places to visit and lots of indoor entertainment too.

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County Carlow

Carlow has an undulating and fertile landscape, with many picturesque towns and villages. The second smallest county (after Leitrim), it is bounded on the east by the granite **Blackstairs Mountains**. It's little known, even among the Irish, as it is off the main routes between cities.

The county's unspoiled environment makes it an ideal destination for walking, cycling, angling, riding or playing golf. There's plenty to keep you busy, from pagan sites and early Christian settlements, to beautiful country homes and gardens. Its central location also makes it an ideal base for exploring.

Blackstairs Mountains

The county capital is also called **Carlow,** and other main towns include **Tullow**, **Borris** and **Bagenalstown**.

◆ Getting Here

Carlow Town is on the N9, northeast of Kilkenny City, and the N80 Portlaoise-Enniscorthy road. It's connected by rail and bus to other parts of the country.

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◆ Tourist Information

South East Tourism Ltd. is the official Regional Tourist Authority for Carlow, Kilkenny, South Tipperary, Waterford and Wexford. Its head office is at 41 The Quay, Waterford City, Ireland, ☎ (051) 875-823, (051) 876-720; info@southeasttourism.ie.

Fáilte Ireland Tourist Office, Tullow Street, Carlow. ☎ (059) 913-1554; fax 70776; carlowtio@eircom.net.

Carlow Tourism, ☎ +353 (059) 913-0411, info@carlowtourism.com.

For further information on Carlow, contact Carlow Tourism, see above, or fax + 353 (059) 913-0477, info@carlowtourism.com.

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

The Carlow Genealogy Project, Old School, College Street. ☎/fax (059) 913-0850; carlowgenealogy@iolfree.ie.

◆ Sightseeing

Carlow Town

The town grew up around **Carlow Castle**, built by Hugh de Lacy as a stronghold in about 1180. This strategic point where the rivers Barrow and Burren meet also marked the southeastern border of the Pale. The castle survived a number of attacks, including one by rebels, who were slaughtered in 1798. However, it couldn't hold out against a Doctor Middleton, who in 1814 decided to knock it down, using explosives, and turn it into an asylum. What survives are the west wall of the keep and two of its former towers. You get the best view of it from across the River Barrow.

Carlow Castle

Today, Carlow is an attractive and bustling county town, with a rich agricultural hinterland. It is worth at least a brief visit, as there is much to see.

Tullow Street is where you find most of the shops. **The Liberty Tree**, just off it, commemorates the 1798 rebellion and is by leading contemporary sculptor John Behan. On Dublin Street is the **Cigar Divan**, with its distinctive Victorian shopfront. The **County Museum**, housed in the Town Hall, is undergoing renovation and is closed at the time of writing. **Carlow Courthouse**, designed by William Morrison, looks like a temple on a plinth. It was intended for Cork, but there was a mix-up, which is how a small town got such an impressive building!

St. Patrick's College, opened in 1793, was the first post-penal Catholic seminary in the country, and beside it is the **Cathedral**, completed in 1833. **St. Mary's Church of Ireland** dates from 1727, with its tower and spire added in 1834. The interior is interesting for its galleries and monuments, including some by the neo-classical architect Sir Richard Morrison, son of William.

Croppies Grave

Take a short walk away from the town along the River Barrow to **Graiguecullen Bridge**, built in 1569 and widened in 1815. Nearby you find the **Croppies' Grave**. After the failure of 1798, the bodies of 640 rebels were thrown here and covered in quicklime. The site was later marked by a monument. They got the name "Croppies" because they cut their hair short as a sign of allegiance to the United Irishmen. Croppy Acre on Ellis Quay in Dublin, in front of the National Museum of Decorative Arts, is their best-known mass grave in the Republic.

A TRADITION REVIVED

Until about 100 years ago this was the malt and hop producing area of Ireland, with a number of breweries. In 1998 the **Carlow Brewing Company** revived the tradition. All of its award-winning products are naturally brewed, based on traditional Celtic beer styles. The Brewery is housed in The Goods Store, an old stone building, beautifully restored and converted, with a visitors' bar, beside Carlow Railway Station. Tours by appointment. ☎ (059) 913-4356; fax 40038; www.carlowbrewing.com, info@carlowbrewing.com.

AN AMERICAN MILITARY MEMORY

Captain Myles Keogh of the 7th Cavalry, killed with General Custer at the Battle of Little Big Horn, is remembered at the **County Carlow Military Museum**, Old Church, St. Dympna's Hospital, Athy Road, Carlow. Displays also include Ireland's role in UN peacekeeping. Open some Sundays, July-October, 2-5:30 pm. Call to check. ☎ (087) 285-0509; military.museum@ireland.com.

Touring the Countryside

Head out into the country to do some more sightseeing. The most impressive prehistoric monument in the county is the **Browneshill Dolmen**, east of Carlow Town, believed to be the largest of its kind in Europe, with a capstone weighing 100 tons. Religious rites, perhaps involving human sacrifice, were performed here from 2500 BC.

Browneshill Dolmen

There are other monuments around Tullow, including the **Haroldstown Dolmen** at Tobinstown, and the **Rathgall Stone Fort**.

Near **Rathvilly** is a large motte, built to defend the crossroads it stands by. For information on field monuments in Carlow see www.megalithomania.com.

Altamont Garden is signposted on the N80 and N81, six miles (10 km) from Tullow. The 100-acre estate has both formal and informal gardens, with rare trees, rhodendrons and shrubs, roses old and modern, and lots of herbaceous plants. There are fascinating walks through the Arboretum, Bog Garden, Ice Age Glen, a River Walk along the Slaney, and a Hill Walk with wonderful views of the Blackstairs and Wicklow Mountains. The 2½-acre lake was dug after the Irish Potato Famine, and took 100 men with horses and carts two years to complete at a cost in 1847-48

River Slaney at Altamont

of £12,000 – a fortune at the time. Open Easter to end of October; Monday to Thursday, 9 am to 5 pm; Friday until 3:30 pm; phone ahead for weekend hours. ☎ (059) 915-9444, www.heritageireland.ie, altamontgardens@opw.ie.

Bagenalstown, 13 miles (21 km) south of Carlow on the R705/R724 and the River Barrow, is named after founder William Bagenal who planned it to look like Versailles. He didn't get to finish it, but the impressive Courthouse is modelled on the Parthenon in Athens, and other buildings make it a very attractive town with fine streetscapes. You can visit Bagenal's home, **Dunleckney Manor**, though public hours are limited to certain days in March, May, and June through September. ☎ (059) 972-1932 for details.

Ballyloughan Castle, Carlow

Near the town are the ruins of **Ballyloughan Castle**, built about 1300. Two miles (3.2 km) east of the town are the ruins of **Ballymoon Castle**, probably built at the same time.

Ballon is a pretty village, with great views of the Blackstairs and Wicklow Mountains. There was a Bronze Age settlement on Ballon Hill, where these days you can enjoy a two-mile walk.

Borris

Borris House, Carlow

Borris is an attractive estate town in the fertile valley of the River Barrow below the Blackstairs Mountains, 16 miles (26 km) south of Carlow on the R702. Handsome stone-cut buildings and traditional shop and pub fronts give the town great appeal and it is worth at least stopping here to take a look. The MacMurrough Kavanagh family, formerly Celtic Kings of Leinster, who built it, still live in the middle of town at **Borris House**. Arthur MacMurrough Kavanagh

was responsible for the graceful 16-arch viaduct at the lower end, which used to carry the Great Southern and Western Railway Line between Bagenalstown and Wexford.

There are pleasant walks along the River Barrow at **Clashganny Forest**, three miles (4.8 km) south of Borris.

Clashganny Forest, Clonegal

The signposted **Mount Leinster Drive** starts in Borris near the railway viaduct and takes a whole day to cover the circular route, taking you to Bunclody, Clonegal, Kildavin, Myshall, Fenagh, Bagenalstown and back to Borris. En route is **Mount Leinster** (2,600 feet/795 m) is the highest point in the Blackstairs Mountains and is popular for hang-gliding. You see wonderful scenery as you climb. From its summit, or from the **Nine Stones** viewing point, you get a panorama of the county and its neighbors, Wexford, Kilkenny and Wicklow – even the coast of Wales across the Irish Sea if you're lucky.

AUTHOR SUGGESTIONS

Make time to visit the unforgettable **Adelaide Memorial Church** at Myshall. It's a scaled-down replica of Salisbury Cathedral in England built by John Duguid, a London businessman, in memory of his daughter and wife who died tragically. It has fine stained glass windows by leading Irish artist Evie Hone. To visit, collect the key from Mrs Bridie Daley in the white bungalow opposite. ☎ (059) 915-7671. Near Myshall on the Kildavin Road is the **Ballykeenan Pet and Aviary Farm**, run by the McCord family. It's also signposted about two miles (3.2 km) from Ballon off the Carlow-Rosslare road (N80). Open Monday-Saturday, 11 am-6 pm, Sunday 2-6 pm. ☎ (059) 915-7665; www.carlow-ceb.com/ballykeenan. Peter Fenelon Collier (1849-1909), who founded *Collier's Magazine*, was born in Myshall. He arrived penniless in the United States at age 16 and went on to build up a publishing empire worth $12 million.

Bunclody, on the River Slaney, has a pretty mall lined by trees; **Clonegal** is another picturesque village, and Huntingdon Castle & Gardens nearby is worth a visit. It's the home of the Temple of Isis as well as fascinating items from Egypt, Africa, and prehistoric Ireland. ☎ (059) 547-7552.

The **Durdan** or **Weavers Cottages** in Clonegal date from late 17th century, when weaving was an important local industry. During summer you can watch demonstrations of spinning and weaving in the two cottages that survive of the original six. Driving on, you come to Kildavin, where the long-distance walk, the **South Leinster Way**, begins.

◆ Adventures

On Foot – An Unusual Walk

Carlow Bat Walk is a short walk to take at dusk in the town to see bats come out hunting for insects. If that interests you, call Lorcan Scott. ☎ (059) 913-620; fax 41503.

The waymarked **South Leinster Way** is 62 miles (100 km) long, stretching from Kildavin to Carrick-on-Suir in neighboring Co. Tipperary, and offers plenty of variety. Its Carlow stretch takes walkers between mountains and along forest tracks over the northern slopes of Mount Leinster, its highest point. It drops down into Borris and follows the towpath along the River Barrow, leading you on into Co. Kilkenny.

River Barrow

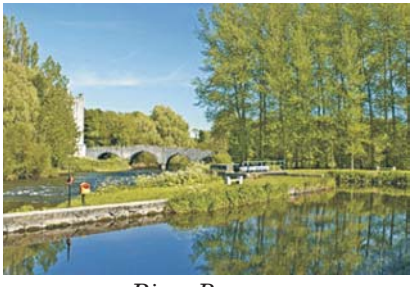
The **Barrow Way** from Lowtown, Co. Kildare to St. Mullins in Co. Kilkenny follows the river's towpath for 68 miles (109 km), part of it passing through Co. Carlow. En route you see river life, including swans and mallards, traditional lock gates, pretty lock houses,and historic castles and ruins.

Bahana Forest, which probably got its name from "beith," the Irish for birch, is an old wood, sloping down to the Barrow between St.

Mullin's and Graignamanagh. You see a great variety of conifers, a diverse range of flora as well as lots of birds, rabbits, squirrels, pheasant and woodcock. You may even see otters on the river bank.

On Water

You can take a cruising holiday on the **Barrow**, the second longest river in the country (after the Shannon), which passes through County Carlow. Embark at Vicarstown, Co. Laois, with **Barrowline Cruises**; ☎ (057) 862-6060; fax 862-5625; www.barrowline.ie.



River Barrow

With **Leisure Afloat** you embark at Levitstown Lock near Athy – see Kildare, page 151. ☎ (056) 775-4395; www.leisureafloat.com.

FISHING

If you are interested in salmon or trout angling near Carlow Town, contact the **Anglers Association** at Butlers Bar, 6 Centaur Street, ☎ (059) 914-2307.

The River Burren, with a good stock of brown trout, joins the River Barrow at Carlow. The Barrow Angling Club has extensive fishing rights on it. Upstream from Carlow, the River Lerr joins the Barrow, with a small stock of brown trout, and the Barrow Angling Club controls some of the water. Contact **JB Motor & Sport**, Castlehill Centre, Carlow.

The River Greese joins the Barrow north of Carlow Town, and has a good stock of wild brown trout. Fishing is controlled by two angling clubs: the Barrow Angling Club and the **River Greese Anglers' Association** (contact Patrick Leigh). ☎ (059) 862-6611.

A FISHING VACATION

The **Ballin Temple Fishery** is on the River Slaney at Ardattin near Tullow, in a special area of conservation. The best salmon fishing is from March to May, and trout are available all season, which ends in late August. Day visitors welcome. Refurbished traditional cottages

(built in the 19th century) are available on Ballin Temple Fishery a self-catering basis or you can stay in the Lodge. ☎ (059) 915-5566; fax 915-5038; e-mail:manager@ballintemple.com www.ballintemple.com.

For tackle and permits, contact **O'Connor's Newsagents**, The Square, Tullow, ☎ (0503) 51337; **Mr. A. McCullagh**, Market Square, Bagenalstown, ☎ (0503) 21381; or **Murph's Fishing**, Tullow Street, Carlow, ☎ (0503) 32839.

FISHING IN THE SOUTHEAST

The great game and coarse fishing rivers in the Southeast of the Republic, managed by the Southern Regional Fisheries Board, are the **Suir**, the **Nore**, the **Barrow**, the **Blackwater** and the **Slaney**. The Suir, especially in its upper reaches, has good trout stocks, and the Blackwater is noted for its salmon.

Managed stillwater fishing is also available, including at Ballyshunnock and Knockaderry reservoir, Waterford, Belle Lake, Dunmore East, and Dromana Lake, Cappoquin, all in Co. Waterford and Oaklands Lake at New Ross, Co. Wexford.

The sea angler also has lots of locations to choose from, and there are numerous opportunities for fishing from beaches and rocky shorelines.

For more information, check locally at tackle and other outlets, or contact the **Southern Regional Fisheries Board**, Anglesea Street, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary. ☎ (052) 80055; fax 23971.

On Horseback

Carrigbeg Riding Centre, three miles (4.8 km) off the Bagenalstown-to-Myshall road, is open all year, Monday-Saturday. ☎ (059) 972-1962.

The **Forge Stables Riding School**, Tolerton, Killeshin, Carlow Town. Open all year, ☎ (056) 42570.

Coole Equestrian Centre, Rathvilly, ☎ (059) 916-1000.

Echo Equestrian Centre, Rathill, Rathvilly, ☎ (059) 916-1577.

◆ Golf

The 18-hole **Carlow Golf Club**, Deerpark, Dublin Road, has a parkland course that can be played year-round. ☎ (059) 913-1695; www.carlowgolfclub.com. There's also the **Carlow Town Golf Course**, a par 3, 18-hole affair. Quinagh House, Mortarstown. ☎ (059) 913-2088. Just outside Carlow Town is **Killerig Castle Golf & Country Club**, playable all year, with some great scenery. ☎ (059) 916-3000; fax 916-3005; www.killerig.com, info@killerig.com.

In the northeast of the county is **Clonmore Golf Club**. ☎ (059) 647-1244. Situated in the scenic northeast corner of Co. Carlow, in an area noted for its historical interest and photogenic landscape, this golf course is an 18-hole par 3, with additional facilities for skittles and boules. Open all year, with clubs for rent.

Carrigleade Golf Course is on the Barrow Drive between St. Mullins and Graignamanagh, with the Blackstairs and Brandon mountains as a backdrop. ☎ (059) 972-4370.

Mount Wolseley Golf & Country Club, Tullow, lies between the Wicklow and Blackstairs Mountains, on a mature estate close to the Slaney. You can also stay there. ☎ (059) 915-1674, fax 915-2123; www.mountwolsey.ie, info@mountwolsey.ie.

Borris Golf Club is a nine-hole parkland course in the south of the county with marvelous views of the Blackstairs to the east and the Barrow valley to the west. ☎ (0503) 73143.

◆ Where to Stay

For accommodations pricing guide, see page 195.

Hotels

☆☆☆ **Seven Oaks Hotel** is on Athy Road in Carlow. It has 60 individually designed bedrooms and the staff are friendly and attentive. Its **Health & Leisure Club** is well-equipped and has a swimming pool. **T.D. Molly's** restaurant offers excellent choice, with an emphasis on quality local produce. The **Tudor Bar** serves carvery lunch every day and also has a varied Nite Bite menu. From $$. ☎ (059) 913-1308; fax 913-2155; sevenoak@eircom.net, www.sevenoakshotel.com.

☆☆☆ **The Lord Bagenal Inn** is on the River Barrow in the heritage village of Leighlinbridge, just off the main N9 Dublin/Waterford Road, eight miles (13 km) from Carlow and 20 miles (32 km) from Kilkenny. It looks delightful. It has just 12 en suite bedrooms, as well as gardens and a private marina, offering angling and boating. Its restaurant is known for its fine food and impressive wine list, and has won many awards, including a Golden Plate by Les Routiers, one of only five in Ireland. Bar menu all day; self-catering apartments available. ☎ (059) 972-1668; fax 972-2629; www.lordbagenal.com, info@lordbagenal.com.

Mount Wolseley Hotel, Golf and Country Club also has houses for rent, and its own golf course. The estate, close to the Slaney, was owned by the Wolseleys, designers of the first British car in 1895, and after that it was owned by a religious order. Now there are 40 bedrooms in the hotel. The houses are actually on the golf course and each sleeps seven, in four bedrooms. ☎ (059) 915-1674, fax 915-2123; www.mountwolseley.ie.

Cottage Rentals

Near Rathvilly, 12 miles (19 km) from Carlow, is the **Lisnavagh Estate**, a really peaceful place to stay. The two cottages, **Farm Cottage** and **Blacksmith's Cottage**, are beautifully renovated. Rates are €175 to €295 per week, depending on the season (highest rates are in July and August; lowest are November and December). ☎ (059) 916-1104; fax 916-1148; www.lisnavagh.com, info@lisnavagh.com.

Hostel

The **Otterholt Riverside Lodge Hostel** is on Kilkenny Road, Carlow, and is open all year. ☎ (059) 913-0404; otterholt_riverside_lodge@hotmail.com.

◆ Where to Eat

Tullow Street is right in the center of Carlow Town and there are plenty of places to eat. Among them are:

Reddys Bar & Restaurant has been here since 1768. It serves snacks, carvery lunches and full meals. Its menu includes steaks, fish, traditional Irish, Italian, Chinese, and vegetar-

ian dishes. It's open seven days, for lunch from 12:30-2:30 pm and dinner from 5:30 to 10 pm. ☎ (059) 914-2224.

The **Dinn Rí** has a bar and a bistro. In the bar you can enjoy delicious and great value carvery lunch, or avail of its afternoon and evening menu, available until 9pm. Weather permitting you can eat or drink outside on its Cedar Square Terrace. Its bistro stays open until 11:30pm, Monday to Thursday; until 2am on Saturday and until 11pm on Sunday. Dinn Rí is also an entertainment venue from Thursday to Sunday, with DJs in **The Foundry** and live music in **The Tower**. It's also a small hotel with 10 rooms, rates from $$. ☎ (059) 913-3111; fax 913-0403, www.dinnri.com.

Teach Dolmain bar and restaurant is named after the Browneshill Dolmen. Carvery lunch is served from noon to 3pm, and from then until 9:30pm there's a bar menu. Its **Carlovian Bistro** has a full à la carte menu on Friday and Saturday nights from 7-10:30pm. ☎ (059) 913-0911.

County Kilkenny

This inland county is called *Cill Chainnigh* in Irish – meaning Cainneach's or **Saint Canice's** church, which is the name of the cathedral in its capital. It has a very fertile central plain with higher ground to its northeast, northwest and south, and is bisected by the river Nore, with the Barrow and Suir marking its boundaries in the east and south. Its capital is **Kilkenny City** and the main towns are **Callan**, **Castlecomer**, **Thomastown** and **Graiguenamanagh**.

◆ Getting Here

Kilkenny City is served by major roads N77-N78-N9-N7 from Dublin (71 miles/114 km); N76-N24-N8 from Cork (91 miles/146 km) and N77-N7-N62-N52-N65-N6-N18 from Galway (107 miles/172 km).

It's also on the mainline rail link from Heuston Station, Dublin, to Waterford, and is well served by Bus Éireann. **MacDonagh Station**, Kilkenny, ☎ (056) 772-2024.

◆ Tourist Information

The **Shee Alms House** in Rose Inn Street is the Tourist Information office, one of the most attractive in the country. It was built by Sir Richard Shee in 1582 to accommodate 12 poor persons. The Shee family was dispossessed by Cromwell, but regained ownership in 1756. The last recorded inmates were in 1830. Upstairs there's the City Scope project – a scale model of the city in the 16th century. During summer, walking tours of the city start here. ☎ (056) 775-1500; fax 776-3955; kdowling@southeasttourism.ie, www.kilkenny.ie, www.kilkennytourism.ie.

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

Kilkenny Archaeological Society, based in Rothe House, Parliament Street, ☎ (056) 772-2893; rothehouse@eircom.net; www.kilkennyarchaeologicalsociety.ie.

◆ Sightseeing

Around Kilkenny

You can explore the county, with its gentle landscape, by bike or car. Off the main roads you'll discover the attractive countryside. There are signposted routes through the county, taking you to places of historic, cultural or natural interest, which you can ask about at a tourist office, check out www.kilkennytourism.ie, or go as you please.

Kilkenny City

This was the ecclesiastical and political capital of the ancient kingdom of Ossory, and became the medieval capital of the country under the Normans. In 1172, Richard de Clare, known as Strongbow, built a wooden fortress here, and in 1208 it was granted a charter by William, the Earl Marshall, to attract trade. From the 14th century, **Kilkenny Castle** was the seat of the Butlers, the Earls and Dukes of Ormonde. King James I granted its charter as a city in 1609, amalgamating its two townships of Hightown and Irishtown.

From 1293 to 1408 and between 1642 and 1648 Anglo-Norman parliaments were held here. In 1642 the Confederation of Kilkenny saw

Irish Catholics side with King Charles I. They lost to Cromwell in 1651 and after that most of the families involved were sent to Connaught and the city's trade passed to Protestants.

Known as the Marble City, from the vein of black stone found here, Kilkenny stands on the River Nore and has some beautiful buildings that have been well looked after. Unlike other towns and cities, here the local authorities have taken care of their city's appearance and resisted the proliferation of ugly plastic signs. Visitors have been attracted to Kilkenny for decades, and it's worth at least a daytrip if you are staying in Dublin or elsewhere.

KILKENNY TODAY

The town has been a center for brewing since the 17th century, and the tradition continues today. However, if you mention the city to most Irish people, they'll immediately think of design. This is because in 1965 the government established **Kilkenny Design Workshops** in the 18th-century stables of the castle. It quickly developed an international reputation for the quality of its graphic, industrial and craft design. Since then, designers, artists and craft-workers from all over the world have established studios and workshops throughout the city and county.

The **Crafts Council of Ireland** has its headquarters here, and runs **The National Craft Gallery**. ☎ (056) 776-1804; fax 776-3754; info@ccoi.ie or ncg@ccoi.ie. It's also behind the Kilkenny E-Commerce Craft Initiative, which lists information and a product catalog on its Web site, www.ccoi.ie.

Kilkenny Design has retail outlets here. ☎ (056) 772-2118; fax 776-5905; in Dublin on Nassau Street, ☎ (01) 677-7066, and in Galway. Check their Web site at www.kilkennydesign.com.

Kilkenny County Council publishes a guide to *Artists' Studios* and a *Kilkenny Sculpture Guide* – ask for them at the tourist office or you can find them at the Arts Office, 42 Parliament Street, Kilkenny, ☎ (056) 779-4138, www.kilkennycoco.ie/arts.

◆ Entertainment

Kilkenny Arts Festival is one of the oldest in the county, founded in 1974, and brings some of the world's major performers and companies to the city every August;

www.kilkennyarts.ie/about_kilkenny.html. The city also hosts **Murphy's Cat Laughs Comedy Festival** in late Spring and music, comedy and theater can be enjoyed year-round, with venues including the Watergate Theatre; www.kilkennyarts.ie.

◆ Walking Tours

Kilkenny Castle Park

Kilkenny Castle, River Nore

Kilkenny Castle and its extensive grounds on the River Nore are open to the public by guided tour only. It is one of the most popular sites in the country and can be busy in summer. The 12th-century castle was remodeled in the late 19th century and handed over to the State in the 1960s, having been the home of the Butler family, Earls, Marquesses and Dukes of Ormonde, from 1391-1935. The **Butler Gallery** in its basement shows contemporary art. Tours of Castle Park are on Sundays in July and August at 3 pm. Open daily all year (hours vary); tea room open May-September. ☎ (056) 772-1450; fax 776-3488.

Tree-lined river walks and meadows make Kilkenny Castle Park a quiet retreat from the city. You see ducks, swans and other waterfowl, as well as bats hunting at night. Walking along the River Nore near Green's Bridge, you can see some of the old woolen mills.

St. Canice's Cathedral

Less than two miles (3.2 km) northeast of the city, off the Castlecomer Road, is **Newpark Marsh**, ideal for a stroll. Once a lake, it's been colonized by reeds and other vegetation and is home to lots of wild plants, including yellow iris, ragged robin and purple loosestrife.

Kilkenny City

Kilkenny is compact, so it's easy to explore on foot. **St. Canice's Cathedral**, built in the 13th century (on the site of the monastery founded by the saint who gives the county its name), was partly destroyed by Cromwell's troops in 1650, but restored 200 years later. The round tower beside the cathedral was built around 849AD and has a viewing platform. During the Arts Festival in August, and at various other times, there are recitals in the cathedral. ☎ (056) 776-4971; stcanicescathedral@eircom.net.

The **Tholsel** (Town Hall) is on High Street and dates from 1761. It has a double five-arch arcade that used to be a covered market, and a lantern tower, with a clock that has a beautiful chime. Its name comes from "toll" and "sael" – Old English words meaning "tax" and "hall" (or "the place where the tax was paid"). Today it houses Kilkenny Corporation, so its purpose hasn't changed completely.

The **Black Abbey**, on Blackmill Street, was founded in 1225 for the Dominicans (it gets its name from the black habits worn by the Dominican order) and has had a chequered history. It's worth visiting for its stained glass windows, and the statues and relics on display.

Black Abbey

Rothe House is a personal favorite. Although built in 1594 by wealthy merchant John Rothe, in a style influenced by the Italian Renaissance, it's on the scale of a family home. Open Monday to Saturday, March to November, 10:30 am to 5 pm; Sunday, 3 to 5 pm; limited winter hours. Admission €3. Parliament Street, ☎ (056) 772-2893, www.kilkennyarchaeologicalsociety.ie.

Callan

Callan is about 10 miles (16 km) from Kilkenny on the N76. It gets its name from Niall Caille, High King of Ireland, who drowned trying to rescue a servant here in 884, while at war with the Vikings. Cromwell is believed to have stabled his horses in the ruined Abbey, and there's a holy well in the Abbey Meadow.

Edmund Rice (1762-1844), founder of the Christian Brothers, was born here, and there's a monument to him. **Rice House** is open to visitors year-round, 10 am to 1 pm and 2-6 pm. ☎ (056) 772-5141.

THE COCA-COLA CONNECTION

Callan was the home of the Candlers. Asa Griggs Candler bought the Coca-Cola recipe from its inventor Dr John Pemberton in 1888 in Atlanta, and founded the soft drink company, which he sold in 1923 for a fortune. Sadly, the Candler home on West Street has almost disappeared.

Castlecomer

River Dinin, Castlecomer

Castlecomer is 10 miles (16 km) north of Kilkenny, where the N77 and R694 meet. A humpback bridge crosses the River Dinin and opens into a pleasant square with Georgian houses surrounded by lime trees. The town was laid out by Sir Christopher Wandesford, whose family started a coal mine here. It lasted for 300 years until its closure in 1969.

Nearby at Ballyfoyle off the N78 is **Dunmore Cave**, which consists of a series of chambers developed over millions of years, with dramatic limestone formations. In the care of the State Heritage Service, there's an interesting exhibition in the Visitors Centre, where refreshments are also available. Open daily from mid-March to the end of October, weekends only in winter; times vary. ☎ (056) 776-7726.

Urlingford

One of the best-known towns in the county is Urlingford. It's on the main N8 Dublin-Cork road, and is popular as a stop if driving between the two cities, since it's roughly half-way. Its name means "the ford of the big stones" and just north of it are the ruins of a church and castle, with a cutaway bog around it.

Thomastown

Thomastown, 11 miles (17 km) southeast of Kilkenny on the N9/R700, was founded about 1200 on an important river crossing of the Nore by the Norman Thomas FitzAnthony. It has kept the charm of a small medieval walled town, and is still a market town. At one time there were 12 water-powered mills here, but the last one closed in 1963, although some of the buildings survive. Nearby is the magnificent **Mount Juliet estate**, now a hotel with championship golf course.

Jerpoint Abbey

Jerpoint Abbey, southwest of Thomastown on the N9, was founded in the 12th century by the Cistercian order. It's in the care of the State Heritage Service; its most memorable features are the **sculptured cloister arcade** and accompanying **carvings**. There's a Visitor Centre with an exhibition. Open daily, March 1-November 31. ☎ (056) 772-4623; fax 775-4003; jerpointabbey@ealga.ie.

Carvings at Jerpoint Abbey

◆ Adventures

On Water

BOATING

Graiguenamanagh is 22 miles (35 km) southeast of Kilkenny on the R703/R705. It nestles in a valley on the River Barrow, surrounded by hills, with the Blackstair Mountains on one side. The regatta here in August is one of the oldest in the country.

Valley Boats is a small family company, based on the River Barrow at Graiguenamanagh, which offers barge rentals, with a choice of narrow boats, from two- to six-berth. ☎ (059) 972-4945; info@valleyboats.ie; www.valleyboats.ie.

FISHING

Kilkenny is a great fishing county and Thomastown has been a popular angling center for centuries. Among the county's other attractions is Ballyhogan Lake, a three-acre private lake near Graiguenamanagh, which has stocks of bream, rudd, rudd/bream hybrids and tench. Details at ☎ (059) 972-4191.

TACKLE SHOPS

Hook Line and Sinker, Rose Inn Street, Kilkenny, ☎ (056) 777-1699

Noreside Outdoors, 2 Market Street, Thomastown, Kilkenny, ☎/fax (056) 779-3966.

Town and County Sports Shop, High Street, Kilkenny, ☎ (056) 772-1517

On Horseback

The Iris Kellett Equestrian Centre, Mount Juliet, Thomastown. ☎ (056) 777-3044; info@mountjuliet.ie; www.mountjuliet.com.

The Top Flight Equestrian Centre, Warrington, Kilkenny. ☎ (056) 777-0792; tfwarrington@tinet.ie; www.topflightkilkenny.com.

The Nuenna Farm Equestrian Centre, near Freshford, ☎ (056) 883-2614.

◆ Spectator Sports

County Kilkenny is renowned for **GAA** (Gaelic Athletic Association – see page 64), in particular for its hurling team; ask locally about matches.

Gowran Park Racecourse, in a lovely wooded setting, has been the home of horse racing in the county since 1914. ☎ (056) 772-6225; fax 772-6173; gowranpk@eircom.net.

◆ Golf

Mount Juliet has the most famous course in the county, with a beautiful setting in an historic 1500-acre estate, and it has hosted international championships.

Mount Juliet Hotel & Golf Club

Kilkenny Golf Club is a mile and a half from the city on the N77. ☎ (056) 776-5400; enquiries@kilkennygolfclub.com; www.kilkennygolfclub.com.

Mountain View Golf Club, Kiltorcan, Ballyhale, is in South Kilkenny, 12 miles (19 km) from the city and 14 miles (22 km) from Waterford, a mile off the main road. ☎ (056) 776-8122; info@mviewgolf.com; www.mviewgolf.com.

Callan Golf Club is a mile from the town. ☎ (056) 772-5136; info@callangolfclub.com; www.callangolfclub.com.

◆ Where to Stay

For accommodations pricing guide, see page 195.

Hotels

☆☆☆☆ **The Mount Juliet Hotel** is in a wonderful setting, a former estate with mature woods and parklands. The 18th-century house is now a luxurious hotel, and accommodation is also available in the Paddocks, Hunters Yard and the Rose Garden. In addition to its own golf course, facilities

include a Spa and Leisure Centre, and guests can enjoy river fishing, clay target shooting, archery, or tennis. It has its own Equestrian Centre, and you can ride for 10 miles (16 km) without leaving the estate. $$$$. ☎ (056) 777-3010; fax 777-3019; www.mountjuliet.com.

☆☆☆ The **Springhill Court Hotel** is on the Waterford Road, just a few minutes outside Kilkenny City. It's a modern building with 83 spacious and attractive bedrooms, and a Spa and Leisure Center, with pool, sauna, steam room, Jacuzzi and well-equipped gym. The **Claddagh Restaurant** has an excellent reputation, and is popular with locals – always a good sign. It belongs to Kilkenny's Good Food Circle and Bord Bia's (National Food Board) Feile Bia program, which guarantees the use of local Irish suppliers. Its menu features traditional Irish and Mediterranean dishes. Carvery lunch and bar food is served every day in its **Paddock Bar**, and there's also live entertainment twice a week. From $$, with special weekend break offers. ☎ (056) 772-1122; fax 776-1600; reservations@springhillcourt; www.springhillcourt.com.

☆☆ **The Club House Hotel** is on Patrick Street, Kilkenny, in the middle of the medieval city. It's in an 18th-century building with modern additions, and has 35 pleasant bedrooms. Guests have free parking. Originally the headquarters of a sporting gentleman's club, the hotel has wonderful Georgian architecture, including detailed plasterwork and brass fittings. Lunch and evening meals are served in the Georgian dining room, and are also available in **Victor's Bar**, which has live music in on Saturday evenings. $$, with special midweek and weekend discounts available. ☎ (056) 772-1994; fax 777-1920; clubhse@iol.ie; www.clubhousehotel.com.

☆☆☆ **The Hotel Kilkenny** is on the edge of the city, surrounded by lovely gardens. It has 103 bedrooms and an excellent health and fitness center, with pool, spa area, aerobics room, fully equipped gym, and beauty treatment room. Guests and non-residents can dine in its **Broom's Bistro** or relax in its **Hill Bar**. $$$, with weekend and midweek discounts available. ☎ (056) 776-2000; fax 776-5984; kilkenny@griffingroup.ie; www.griffingroup.ie.

☆☆ **Carrolls Hotel and Restaurant**, Knocktopher, is on the N10, half way between Kilkenny and Waterford. It has 10 bedrooms and two large self-catering apartments available. Its **An Sionnach Si Restaurant** offers Irish and international cuisine, and its **Pakie's Bar** also serves food and is popular with locals. Live music weekly. From

$-$$. ☎ (056) 776-8082; 776-8290; info@carrollshotel.com, www.carrollshotel.com.

Guesthouses

Blanchville House is near Kilkenny City in a lovely rural setting, surrounded by farmland. It was built in 1800, has been restored, and belongs to the Hidden Ireland group (see page 53). There's a tennis court, billiards and games room. Open March 1-November 1, six rooms. $$. Dinner available. ☎ (056) 772-7197; info@blanchville.ie; www.blanchville.ie.

☆☆☆ **Waterside Guesthouse**, The Quay, Graiguenamanagh, is a beautifully converted granite corn store, dating from the 1870s, on the bank of the River Barrow. All of its 10 bedrooms look out over the river and have been refurbished preserving the original beams of the corn store. The three-star guesthouse is popular with walkers, as it's on the long-distance South Leinster Way and near the Blackstairs Mountains. It also attracts those interested in boating, cruising, fishing, or playing golf at nearby courses, including Mount Juliet. Its restaurant, which is also open to non-residents, is listed in top guides and serves excellent local and international cuisine. You can also buy Waterside's unique brown bread made with walnuts and treacle. From $ with special offers. ☎ (059) 972-4246; fax 772-4733; info@waterside.iol.ie; www.watersideguesthouse.com.

☆☆☆ Butler House, Patrick Street, Kilkenny. Staying at this beautiful Georgian house, formerly the home of the Duchess of Ormonde, is memorable. The house was refurbished in the 1970s by Kilkenny Design, so contemporary furnishings are combined with its original features, which include marvellous plasterwork. Guests stroll through its gardens for breakfast in the **Kilkenny Design Centre**, housed in the original stables of Kilkenny Castle. Rate $-$$. ☎ (056) 776-5707/772-2828; fax 776-5626; res@butler.ie, www.butler.ie.

Cottage & House Rentals

Wallslough Village is a wonderful rural retreat, less than three miles (4.8 km) from Kilkenny City. It has an equestrian center, with instruction, trekking and shows year-round. There are six thatched cottages to rent overlooking a fishing lake, and two restored pre-Famine houses. ☎ (056)

772-3828; fax 772-3255; info@wallsloughvillage.com; www.wallsloughvillage.com.

Camping & RV Parks

☆☆☆ **Nore Valley Caravan & Camping Park**, near Bennetsbridge, is on a family farm, with home-cooked food available from June to August. There's also a river walk through woodland, and bikes for hire. Open March 1-October 31. ☎ (056) 772-7229; norevalleypark@eircom.net.

☆☆☆ The **Tree Grove Park** is just outside Kilkenny City, a 20-minute walk or cycle along a tree-lined river path. Bike rental on site. Open March 1-November 15. ☎ (056) 777-0302; www.camping-ireland.ie.

Hostels

Foulksrath Castle Hostel, Jenkinstown, is run by An Oige, Ireland's youth hostel association, and is in a Norman Tower House. It's about 8 miles (13 km) from Kilkenny City. ☎ (056) 776-7674; foulksrath@eircom.net, http://www.anoige.ie.

Kilkenny Tourist Hostel is on Parliament Street and open all year. ☎ (056) 776-3541; kilkennyhostel@eircom.net.

◆ Where to Eat

Wander around Kilkenny and you'll find plenty of pubs, many of them also serving food. Among them are **Bollards** and historic **Kyteler's**, both on Kieran Street; and **Breathnachs Steak & Ale House** and the huge and lively **Matt the Miller's**, both on John Street. Also recommended is the family-run **Crotty's Coffee House** on Kieran Street, where you can sit out in the pedestrian-only street while enjoying a snack; open Monday through Saturday, 9am-5:30pm.

The **Marble City Bar** on High Street is one of Kilkenny's oldest, and is featured on postcards. It's now a popular café-bar, serving food from 10am to 8:30pm. ☎ (056) 776-1143.

The **Kilkenny Design Centre Restaurant**, opposite the Castle, is a pleasant place for a snack or meal. ☎ (056) 772-2118.

County Waterford

Much of the north and middle of Co. Waterford is mountainous, with the Comeragh, Knockmealdown and Monavullagh ranges. Its coastline is a mixture of rugged cliffs and sandy bays. It really does have some of the most varied and beautiful scenery in Ireland, as well as seaside resorts, historic sites and plenty of activities to keep any visitor busy.

Waterford City is the county's largest town; its administrative capital is **Dungarvan**. Other main towns are **Tramore** and **Lismore**.

◆ Getting Here

Waterford City is served by the N24-N9-N7 from Dublin (101 miles/162 km); the N25 from Cork (77 miles/124 km). It's also on the railway and has a bus station. **Plunkett Rail Station**, ☎ (051) 873-401; **Bus Station**. ☎ (051) 879-000. You can fly from the UK to **Waterford Airport**. ☎ (051) 875-589

◆ Tourist Information

County Waterford Tourism, info@waterfordtourism.com; www.waterfordtourism.org; www.countrywaterford.com. **Fáilte Ireland** has offices at Waterford Granary, The Quay, Waterford. Monday-Friday, 9 am to 6 pm; Saturday, 10 am to 6 pm; Sunday, July and August only, 11 am to 5 pm; ☎ (051) 875-823; fax 876-720; info@southeasttourism.ie; www.southeastireland.com.

Other tourist information centers are at **Waterford Crystal**, Cork Road, Waterford, daily, 8:30 am to 6 pm, ☎ (051) 358-397; and **The Court House**, Dungarvan, Monday to Friday, 9:30 am to 6 pm; Saturday, 10 am to 5 pm (closed for lunch), ☎ (058) 41741.

Waterford
COMERAGH MOUNTAINS
KNOCKMEALDOWN MOUNTAINS
MONAVULLAGH MOUNTAINS
TIPPERARY
KILKENNY
WEXFORD
CORK
R665
River Tar
River Nire
Clogheen
Ballymacarbry
Rathgormack
Portlaw
N24
River Suir
N25
Ferrybank
R Barrow
Waterford
Ballyhack
R Araglin
Kilmeaden
Kilmacthomas
R Mahon
Passage East
Waterford Harbor
R684
Cappoquin
Millstreet
R Blackwater
Lismore
R Colligan
N25
R Tay
R Dalligan
Ballylaneen
THE COPPER COAST
Fenor
Tramore
Killea
N72
R Finisk
Tallow
R Bride
Villierstown
R Brickey
Dungarvan
Clonea
Stradbally
Knockmahon
Boatstrand
Annestown
Kilfarrasy
Dunmore East
Hook Head
Kiely's Cross
Cashmore
Ring (An Rinn)
R Licky
N25
Youghal
Ardmore (Ceann-a-Rama)
N
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1. Norman Church, Megalithic Tombs, Geneva Barracks
2. Car Ferry
3. Sion Hill House & Gardens
4. Curraghmore Estate House & Gardens
5. Mount Congreve Gardens
6. Mothel Abbey
7. Dungarvan Castle, Town Hall & Museum
8. Tourin House & Gardens
9. Carnegie Library; St. Carthage's Catholic Church; St. Carthage's Church of Ireland Cathedral; Ballysaggartmore Towers; Lismore Castle
10. Dromana House & Gardens
11. Round Tower; Ardmore Cathedral
12. Gaeltacht
13. Waterford Airport

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

Waterford has a particular affinity with Canada's Newfoundland, where there are large numbers of people with roots in the county. The Genealogical Centre at Waterford Heritage Survey, Jenkin's Lane, offers a family research service. ☎ (051) 876-123; fax 850-645; mnoc@iol.ie; www.iol.ie.

◆ Waterford City

Waterford prides itself on being the oldest tourist destination in Ireland, first visited by the Vikings in 852. They founded the city, the oldest in the country, and it still has an historic atmosphere. Its name comes from the Norse *Vethrafjorthr*, meaning "weather haven," due to its sheltered position on the River Suir at the mouth of the harbor that bears its name. It's still an important port, and a lovely place to visit, friendly in scale. Traces of its medieval city walls stand alongside elegant 18th-century buildings, with cobbled back streets, and its waterfront is most attractive.

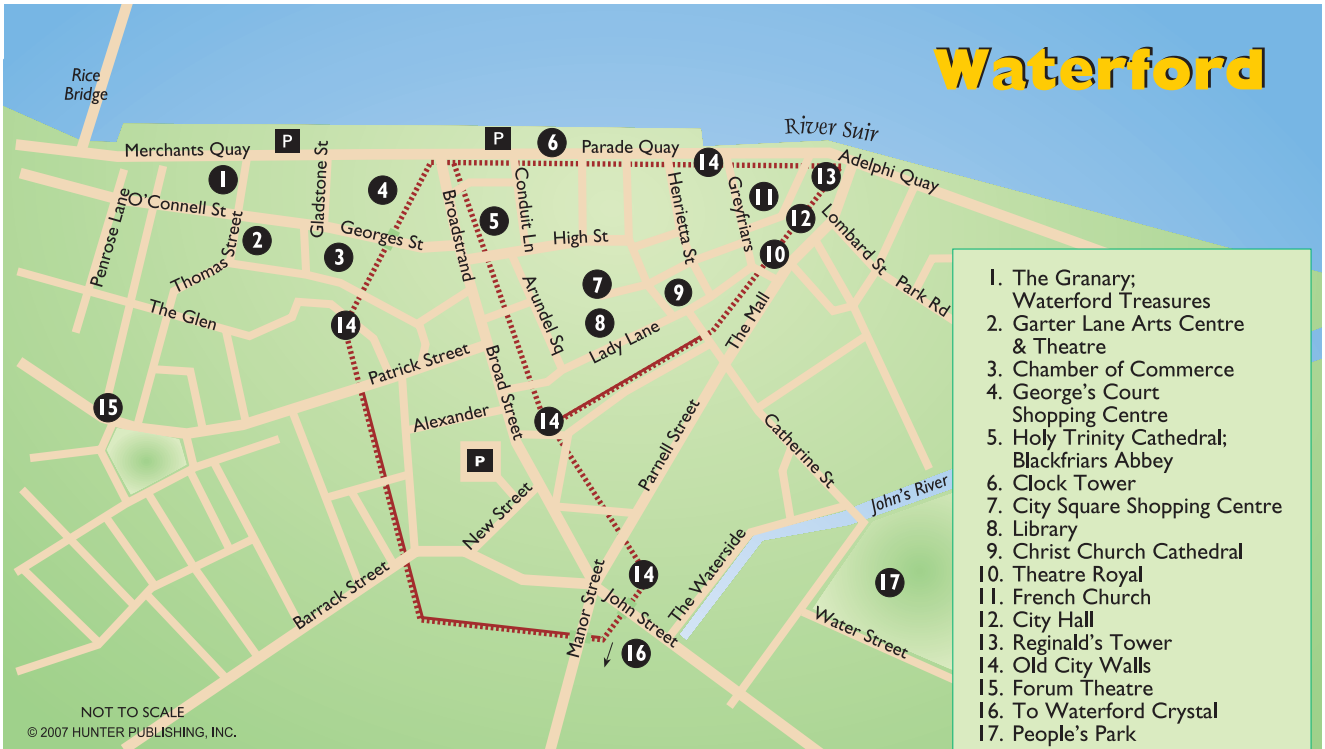
Sightseeing

Reginald's Tower has stood on its Waterford Quay site for more than 1,000 years. Built for defense, it also has been used as a mint, prison and military store. Open Easter and May to late October, daily, 10 am-5 pm; June-September, 9:30 am-6:30 pm; limited hours in winter. ☎ (051) 304-220.

Holy Trinity Cathedral, Waterford

The two cathedrals – the **Church of Ireland Christ Church** and the **Catholic Cathedral of the Most Holy Trinity** – were both designed by locally born architect John Roberts (1714-1796), whose sons Thomas and Sautell were painters.

As you walk around the city, look for the elegant **Chamber of Commerce** building, the **City Hall** and the **Bishop's Palace**. The


Waterford
Rice Bridge
River Suir
Merchants Quay
Parade Quay
Adelphi Quay
O'Connell St
Gladstone St
Penrose Lane
Thomas Street
Georges St
Broadstrand
Conduit Ln
High St
Henrietta St
Greyfriars
Lombard St
Park Rd
The Glen
Arundel Sq
Lady Lane
The Mall
Patrick Street
Broad Street
Alexander
Parnell Street
Catherine St
New Street
John's River
The Waterside
Barrack Street
Manor Street
John Street
Water Street
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1. The Granary; Waterford Treasures
2. Garter Lane Arts Centre & Theatre
3. Chamber of Commerce
4. George's Court Shopping Centre
5. Holy Trinity Cathedral; Blackfriars Abbey
6. Clock Tower
7. City Square Shopping Centre
8. Library
9. Christ Church Cathedral
10. Theatre Royal
11. French Church
12. City Hall
13. Reginald's Tower
14. Old City Walls
15. Forum Theatre
16. To Waterford Crystal
17. People's Park

Granville Hotel on the Quay was the home of the 18th-century patriot, Thomas Francis Meagher, before passing into the hands of Carlo Bianconi, who ran the first national coach network in the 19th century.

You can learn about the city's history at **Waterford Treasures** at the **Granary on the Quay**, which has interactive displays and plenty of artifacts on display. Open daily, year-round, with evening hours from June through August. ☎ (051) 304-500, www.waterfordtreasures.com.

An hour-long walking tour of the town, said to be witty and informative, starts outside **Waterford Treasures** at the Granary, The Quay, Waterford, daily at 11:45 am and 1:45 pm, March to early October. ☎ (051) 873-711.

PARKING

The easiest place to park is in the linear car park along the Quay; you pay at a machine before returning to your car. If that's full, there are car parks in the central area.

Entertainment

There's a long tradition of music and theater in Waterford, and it has a number of venues. The historic **Theatre Royal**, ☎ (051) 874-402, hosts the annual **Waterford International Festival of Light Opera** in October (www.waterfordfestival.com). You can see work by the local professional theater company, Red Kettle, at **Garter Lane Theatre**, 22A O'Connell Street, ☎ (051) 877-153, which also presents touring productions. Other venues include **The Large Room** in City Hall and the **Forum Theatre**, ☎ (051) 871-111. The **Garter Lane Arts Centre**, ☎ (051) 855-038, hosts exhibitions and other events. Many of the pubs have live music. There's also a program of free entertainment during the summer.

Shopping

The main shopping area is within the old city walls, with some of the shops, including **Shaws department store**, along the Quay. Turn up from the Quay onto **Broadstrand Street** and you find lots of different shops,

selling everything from fashion and crafts to books and groceries. There are two shopping centers, **Georges Court** and **City Square**, with plenty of places to have a snack, meal or drink.

The city is the home of **Waterford Crystal**; you can visit the factory on the Cork Road and watch the hand-crafted glass being made. It is particularly popular with North Americans. Gallery and factory tours daily, year-round, except from November to February when the tours are Monday to Friday only. ☎ (051) 373-311; www.waterfordvisitorcentre.com.

*For a really memorable experience, take a trip on **The Galley Cruising Restaurant** from the Quay, between June and August. You gently cruise along the rivers Barrow, Nore and Suir, informed about what you're passing, and you are served delicious food. ☎ (051) 421-723. (It operates from New Ross, Co. Wexford, April-November.)*

◆ Around Waterford

The harbor and coastal routes suit walkers and cyclists, as well as drivers, with lots of places to stop and enjoy, as well as opportunities for adventures on or in water.

Coastal Route

The charming fishing village of **Dunmore East** at the entrance to Waterford Harbor is well worth visiting, with its period houses and thatched cottages. Dunmore East has a **Blue Flag beach** that is popular for watersports, including windsurfing, snorkeling, sailing, and deep-sea fishing.

Traveling towards Passage East on the R685, there's pretty scenery and historic ruins, including part of a **Norman church** in Killea. At Harristown crossroads, before Woodstown and its lovely sandy beach, on the top of the hill there's a **megalithic tomb**. About three miles (4.8 km) from Woodstown you pass the ruins of **Geneva Barracks**, built to house Huguenot silver workers from Switzerland in the 18th century. It became a notorious prison during the 1798 rebellion, and is mentioned in the famous ballad *The Croppy Boy.*

BY HOOK OR BY CROOK

Crooke is the next village – said to be the source of the expression "by hook or by crook" coined by Cromwell, who vowed he'd lay siege to Waterford either from here or across the harbor at Hook Head in Co. Wexford.

Passage East is where Strongbow landed in 1170. There's a car ferry service from here to Ballyhack on the Wexford side of the river (with more than 130 crossings a day, from 7 am weekdays and 9:30 am on Sundays), which saves you a long drive. Last sailing is 8 pm, October to end of March; 10 pm, April to end of September. ☎ (051) 382-480; fax 382-598; www.passageferry.com, passageferry@eircom.net.

Traveling west from Dunmore East along the R685 you come to the best-known resort in the county, **Tramore**, with its long sandy beach backed by sand dunes. It's not my favorite seaside town – it can be busy because of its popularity with Irish families, and there are amusement arcades with gambling machines. Finally, its beach isn't the most attractive in the county. But if you're keen on surfing, it's the place to go.

The Copper Coast Route

The area west of Tramore, known as the Copper Coast, has been awarded European Geopark status for its sites of special geological interest, plus veins of copper, lead and silver. Visit the geo-garden in **Bunmahon** or follow the self-guided trail map. ☎ (051) 292-828, www.coppercoastgeopark.com. For further details, contact Karen Toebbe of Knockmahon Lodge, which is also a bed & breakfast. ☎ (051) 292-249.

The signposted Copper Coast route passes through five villages, with beautiful views of the sea and of the **Comeragh Mountains**. At **Fenor** you can walk in the forest, explore the bog or relax at Kilfarrasy Beach. There's a **Mini Farm**, ☎ (051) 396-444, with pets, a museum and coffee shop. **Annestown's beach** is popular with surfers; while **Boatstrand's harbor** attracts divers and swimmers.

Bunmahon has a Blue Flag beach. Formerly it was a center for copper mining, and you can see the ruins of the workers' cottages. There are hiking trails, a mining trail, and a geological garden. The main

feature in the Heritage Centre is a simulated mine. Open weekend afternoons, July to August. ☎ (051) 396-157.

Stradbally is a delightful village with thatched and slated cottages, surrounded by sandy little beaches and woodlands. **Littlewood Gardens** is a traditional cottage garden, open April to September by appointment. ☎ (051) 293-122.

Dungarvan

Beach at Clonea, near Dungarvan

Dungarvan is the administrative capital of the county and is a busy market town with a lovely setting in a broad bay. It's best approached from the south – on the N25 from Cork – so you can take in the magnificent panorama, but take care driving as the road is windy as you descend into the town.

Dungarvan Castle, in the care of the State Heritage Service, has been undergoing conservation; guided tours are given daily, 10 am to 6 pm, from June to September. There's also a museum in the **Town Hall**, open all year, Monday-Friday, 9 am to 5 pm.

The *Gaeltacht* (Irish-speaking) area of Ring is well-signposted off the N25 just south of Dungarvan. **Clonea**, four miles (6.4 km) east of Dungarvan, has a Blue Flag beach that is two miles (3.2 km) long, ideal for scenic walks. It's also the starting point for touring routes – the **Gaeltacht & Galltacht Scenic Drive**, the **Copper Coast Drive** (mentioned above) and the **Comeragh Mountains & Nire Valley Drive**.

Ardmore

Ardmore is one of the most attractive villages in the country, and has wonderful views from the Round Tower and Cathedral. East of Youghal Harbour, and sometimes called Ram Head or Ardmore head, the promontory's Irish name is *Ceann-a-Rama*. Ardmore was

where the first Christian settlement was founded in Ireland in 316 by **St. Declan**, predating St. Patrick's arrival.

At Ardmore there's a lovely cliff walk, and the long-distance walking route, St. Declan's Way, starts here, taking you to Cashel in Co. Tipperary (58 miles/94 km). It's also on the signposted Gaeltacht and Galltacht Scenic Drive.

Inland

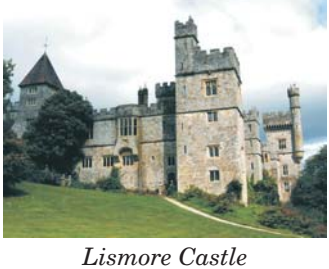
The **Blackwater Valley Drive** takes you from the coast near Youghal inland through the river valley to Lismore. This is one of my favorite areas in the country for a drive. The winding road is skirted by wooded hills and lush greenery. It's always quiet. Along the way there are some delightful villages. Among them is **Villierstown**, built in the 18th century by John Villiers, 1st Earl of Grandison, for workers in his linen weaving industry, which has beautiful stone-cut houses.

Lismore

Lismore is a Heritage Town, in a marvelous setting at the foot of the Knockmealdown Mountains. There's plenty to see, including the 17th-century **St. Carthage's Church of Ireland Cathedral**, and the 19th-century **St. Carthage's Catholic Church** with its Celtic Revival stained glass windows. There's also a **Heritage Centre**. The **Carnegie Library** in the town is one of many in the country funded by Andrew Carnegie, who made his fortune in the US.

In the local cemetery there's a mass grave, a sad reminder of the Great Famine, and nearby is the site of the workhouse where the starving poor sought refuge.

Lismore Castle, originally built in 1185, was acquired by Sir Walter Raleigh (who brought the potato to the island) and then sold to Richard Boyle, 1st Earl of Cork, in 1602. It now belongs to the Duke of Devonshire, whose family name is Cavendish, and is not open to the public, but you can visit its magnificent gardens between mid-April and early October. Fred



Lismore Castle

Astaire's sister married one of the Cavendishs so he often visited, and he'd be seen relaxing in Madden's Bar in the town. The walled and woodland gardens are on two levels; one a rare example of an Elizabethan layout. Open April 30-October 15, 1:45-4:45 pm, from 11 am in July and August. ☎ (058) 54424, fax 54896; www.lismorecastle.com, lismoreestate@eircom.net.

You can rent Lismore Castle, complete with butler and staff, for a week or longer.

Near Lismore is a Gothic gateway called **Ballysaggartmore Towers**. It was part of one Arthur Kiely's grand plan for a house bigger than that of his brother and cost so much that the house itself was never built. **Cappoquin** and **Ballyduff** are other attractive towns in the Blackwater Valley.

On the **Comeragh Mountains** and **Nire Valley Drive** you can see standing stones, *fulachta fiadh* (cooking pits) and cairns around **Kilbrien**, and Ogham stones near **Knockboy**. **Mothel Abbey**, built in the 13th century, is near Rathgormack.

◆ Adventures

On Foot

There is an enormous choice of walks in the county, among them a wilderness trek through spectacular scenery in the **Knockmealdown Mountains**, the **Kilmaloo Walk** at Clashmore, the **Glenshelane River Walk**, and a scenic coastal walk at **Tramore**. There's an annual Walking Festival in the **Comeragh Mountains** (October), a Town Trail to follow in **Dungarvan**, and a number of walks starting near the town.

The **Brickey River and Kilnafarna Hills** walk starts two miles (3.2 km) from Dungarvan on the Clashmore Road. The **Colligan Wood Walk** starts five miles (eight km) from Dungarvan on the road to Clonmel. The **Famine Walk** starts 2½ miles (four km) outside Dungarvan, turning left off the Cork Road and heading towards Ring.

There are many **estates** and **historic gardens** in the county with enjoyable walks, among them the following.

Curraghmore Estate, Portlaw. The home of the Marquis of Waterford since the 12th century. The house isn't open, but there are

pleasant walks on the grounds, which include a primeval forest, and there's a shell house and medieval bridge. ☎ (051) 387-102.

Dromana House and Gardens, Villierstown, is a 17th-century house that overlooks a wild and wonderful garden.

Mount Congreve Gardens, Kilmeaden. A large garden, in woodlands, with a huge variety of plants. There's a walled garden with an elegant Georgian greenhouse. Open Thursdays from April to late September, 9 am-4:30 pm. ☎ (051) 384-115.

Sion Hill House and Gardens, Ferry Bank, Waterford. This mature woodland garden overlooking the River Suir has many rare trees and shrubs. It's currently being restored to its 1870 plans. ☎ (051) 851-558.

Cappoquin House and Gardens is an 18th-century Georgian mansion with informal gardens overlooking the River Blackwater. Open April to July, Monday-Saturday, 9am-1 pm. Closed Sunday. ☎ (058) 54275.

Cappoquin House, Waterford

Tourin House and Gardens, three miles (4.8 km) south of Cappoquin. The gardens on the 17th-century estate are very colorful, with displays of plants, shrubs and trees. Open February to June and September to November. ☎ (058) 54405.

On Water

FISHING

Cappoquin, **Ballyduff** and **Lismore** are the major angling centers for the River Blackwater, which attracts both game and coarse anglers. The **River Tar** and **River Nire** are both good game angling rivers, close to the villages of Ballymacarbry and Newcastle. If you're interested in fishing the **River Suir** you can stay in Waterford City, Portlaw, as well as in the Co. Tipperary towns of Carrick-on-Suir and Clonmel.

The lakes around Tramore hold stocks of brown trout, as do the rivers Colligan, Finisk and Brickey near Dungarvan.

Shore anglers will find a great variety of species near **Dunmore East**, **Cheekpoint** and **Passage East** in East Waterford, all along the coastline, and near **Dungarvan** and **Ardmore** in West Waterford.

There was a lot of U-boat action off the coast here during the First World War, so there are many shipwrecks within an hour of Dunmore East. ☎ (051) 383-397; workboat@oceanfree.net.

USEFUL CONTACTS

Contact **Rinnashark Sea Angling Club** for details on events. ☎ (051) 386-880. Charter boats are available from Dungarvan and Dummore East. Contact the **The Sea Angling Centre**, 6 Mary Street, Dungarvan, ☎ (058) 46401; baumann@cablesurf.com.

Dunmore East Angling Charters offer wreck, reef and shark angling, rod hire and tackle sales, with free tuition. Boats are also available for diving and scenic trips.

On Horseback

Lake Tour Stables are in the Ballyscanlan Hills overlooking Tramore Bay, and run trail rides, including beach treks off-season. Beginners are welcome. ☎ (051) 381-958.

The **Callaghane Riding Centre** in rural Waterford offers farm rides, beach treks. ☎ (051) 382-154, jmcgra@eircom.net.

There are other equestrian options, including the following:

- Colligan Equestrian Centre, near Dungarvan, ☎ (058) 68261
- Melody's Riding Stables, Ballymacarbry, ☎ (052) 36134
- Finisk Valley Riding Centre, Kilmolash Bridge, near Cappoquin, ☎ (024) 96257
- The Village Stables, Woodland Heights, Clonea, is near Portlaw, ☎ (051) 640-611

The **Kilotteran Equitation Centre**, off the N25, four miles (6.4 km) from Waterford City on the road to Dungarvan, offers cross-country and farm rides, and also organizes residential riding vacations. ☎ (051) 384-158.

Horseracing

The Waterford and Tramore Racecourse, Graun Hill, Tramore, was redeveloped in the late 90s, has three bars and two restaurants, and hosts a four-day racing festival in August. ☎ (051) 381-425; racing@tramore.ie; www.tramore-racecourse.com.

◆ Golf

Visitors are welcome at all courses, but do phone in advance for open tee times.

- ***Dungarvan Golf Club**, ☎ (058) 43310*
- ***Dunmore East Golf Club**, ☎ (051) 383-151*
- ***Faithlegg Golf & Country Club**, ☎ (051) 382-000; golf@fhh.ie*
- ***Gold Coast Golf & Leisure**, Ballinacourt, Dungarvan, ☎ (058) 45555; info@goldcoastgolfclub.ie*
- ***Lismore** (nine-hole), ☎ (058) 54026*
- ***Tramore**, ☎ (051) 386-170*
- ***Waterford Castle Golf Club**, ☎ (051) 871-633*
- ***Waterford Golf Club**, ☎ (05) 876-748*
- ***Williamstown Golf Club**, Airport Road, Waterford, pay-and-play; ☎ (051) 853-131*
- ***West Waterford Golf & Country Club**, Dungarvan, ☎ (058) 43216*

◆ Where to Stay

For accommodations pricing guide, see page 195.

Hotels

☆☆☆ **The Granville** in Waterford is run by the Cusack family. It's an historic hotel right on the Quay, with a friendly bar and pleasant restaurant. The hotel is a member of the Best Western group. It has boats available for fishing, and tours of the city can be arranged. $$. ☎ (051) 305-555; fax 305-566; info@granville-hotel.ie; www.granville-hotel.ie.

☆ The **Blackwater Lodge Hotel & Salmon Fishery**, Ballyduff, is in the village's former railway station. It's family-run and friendly, with a cozy bar and restaurant. It offers exclusive salmon fishing, has a tackle shop and can organise ghillies. From $, with self-catering unit also available. ☎ (058) 60235;fax 60162; e-mail: bwlodge@indigo.ie www.blackwaterlodge.net.

The **Travelodge**, on the N25 Cork road, Waterford, opposite Waterford Crystal, has comfortable accommodation and is good value. Note that rate is per room only and not per person. There's a Little Chef restaurant on the premises. $$. ☎ (051) 358-885; fax 358-882 www.travelodge.ie.

Guesthouse Stays & Cottage Rentals

Gold Coast Golf Resort is in a lovely location on the edge of Dungarvan Bay, with an on-site leisure centre next to a golf course. There are 16 cottages, all with three bedrooms, open fire and central heating. Rates vary; check online for special offers. ☎ (058) 45555; info@clonea.com; www.clonea.com.

Flynns Riverview Guesthouse, Cappoquin, with 10 bedrooms, is near golf courses and fishing, stocks bait and has drying rooms. From $. ☎ (058) 54073.

Camping & RV Parks

☆☆☆☆ **Casey's Park** has direct access to the beach at Dungarvan, and is open from late April to early September. ☎ (058) 41919.

☆☆☆☆ **Newtown Cove** is just south of Tramore in a peaceful and sheltered setting, next to the sea. Open May to September. ☎ (051) 381-979; www.newtowncove.com, info@newtowncove.com.

☆☆☆ **Bayview** overlooks Dungarvan Bay and is open April to October. ☎ (058) 45345; bayview@cablesurf.com.

Fitzmaurices Caravan & Camping Park, family-run, at Tramore Beach; ☎ (051) 381-968.

Hostels

Beach Haven Hostel, Tramore, ☎ (051) 390-208; fax 330-971; tivolihouse@eircom.net www.tivolihouse.com.

Bolton House Hostel, Waterford City, ☎ (051) 879-870.

Dungarvan Holiday Hostel, Youghal Road, is open year-round, ☎ (058) 44340; www.dungarvanhostel.com.

Rathgormack Hiking Centre & Hostel, Carrick-on-Suir, is open year-round. ☎ (051) 646-969; www.rathgormackhostel.com.

◆ Where to Eat

Dwyers Restaurant on Mary Street, Waterford, is in a former barracks, and its cuisine is Irish with a French flair. They serve meat, game, and vegetables locally sourced and fish bought at nightly auctions in nearby Dunmore East. Chef and owner Martin Dwyer spent years in France, and when you dine in his restaurant you're surrounded by his fine collection of glass displayed in beech dressers. ☎ (051) 877-478; fax 877-480; info@dwyersrestaurant.com; www.dwyersrestaurant.com.

The **Gingerman** is a welcoming pub on the pedestrian-only Arundel Lane off Broad Street in Waterford City. It serves good food at reasonable prices. Open fires in cold weather. Open from 10am, food served Mon-Sat noon to 6pm. ☎ (051) 879-522.

Eamonn's Place, Main Street, Lismore, is in the middle of the historic West Waterford town. It's a welcoming and cosy pub with a fire to sit by when it's cold. They offer lunchtime specials, and also have a separate restaurant that opens in the evenings. On the menu are vegetable soups, liver and bacon casserole, chicken cordon bleu, sweet braised beef and baked cod, and desserts such as lemon meringue pie and treacle tart. Food served from 12:30-3 pm and 6-9 pm. ☎ (025) 54025.

Orpens Estuary Restaurant, a mile from Waterford City on the road to Dunmore East, just past the Regional Hospital, has lovely views of the estuary and the River Suir. It's popular with families, and caters to a range of tastes, serving traditional Sunday lunch, seafood, steaks, European dishes, vegetarian choices. ☎ (051) 873-082; orpens@eircom.net.

White Horses Restaurant, in the seaside village of Ardmore, serves morning coffee, lunch, afternoon tea, dinner. Open year-round; May to September, 11am-11pm; October-April, weekends only (Friday from 6pm, Saturday from 11am to late evening; Sunday, noon-4pm. Closed Mondays all year. ☎/fax (024) 94040.

McAlpin's Suir Inn is seven miles (11.3 km) from Waterford City in the picturesque village of Cheekpoint, and dates from the 17th century. It's been owned by the McAlpins since 1971 and has won awards for the quality of its food. It's also recommended by good food guides and is best known for its seafood. Lunch and dinner are served. ☎ (051) 382-220; suirinn@mcalpins.com; www.mcalpins.com.

County Wexford

When the Normans invaded Ireland in 1169 they landed here, and the county takes its name from the Norse *Weissefiord*, meaning "the ford of the flats." Like its neighbor Waterford, Wexford has a varied and attractive landscape between its mountains and shoreline, lots of pretty villages and historic sites. Its main rivers are the **Slaney** and **Barrow** and it's the home of the busy ferry port of **Rosslare**, serving the UK and Europe.

It's the best area in the country for bird-watching, with a **wildfowl reserve** and offshore **bird sanctuary**. Its coastline and varied terrain offers plenty of activities, including hill walking, coastal walks, mountain biking and hang-gliding.

The area is closely associated with the 1798 Rebellion, including the battle of Vinegar Hill, and there are plaques marking other events associated with the unsuccessful uprising.

Wexford has a special attraction for many Americans, as the late US President John Kennedy's family came from near New Ross. You can visit their home and the Arboretum dedicated to his memory.

The county capital and largest town is also called **Wexford**, and others include **Enniscorthy**, **Gorey**, **New Ross** and **Rosslare**.

Wexford consistently enjoys more hours of sunshine per year than any other part of the country, so is known as "the Sunny South East." The Wexford average is 4.48 hours per day, while the country's average is 3.75 hours.

◆ Getting Here

Main roads are the N11 from Dublin (88 miles/141 km); N25 from Waterford and Cork (115 miles/185 km).

By rail, you can use *Iarnrod Éireann (Irish Rail) O'Hanrahan Station*, Wexford, ☎ (053) 22522; or Rosslare Harbour Station, ☎ (053) 33114.

The Passage East Car Ferry saves a long drive, with 130+ sailings daily between Ballyhack (South Wexford) and Passage East (Waterford). ☎ (051) 382-480/488; passageferry@eircom.net.

Rosslare Europort station ☎ (053) 33592

Rosslare Strand ☎ (053) 32262

◆ Tourist Information

County Wexford Tourism, No 8a Westgate, Wexford, ☎ (053) 52900; fax 43406; info@wexfordtourism.com, www.WexfordTourism.com

Gorey Tourist Office, Main Street, ☎ (055) 21248; info@northwexford.com www.northwexford.com

Enniscorthy Tourist Office, Castle Museum, ☎ (054) 34699

Rosslare Tourist Office, ☎ (053) 33232

Hook Tourist Office, Fethard-on-Sea, ☎ (051) 397-502

New Ross Tourist Office, The Quay, ☎ (051) 421-857

Fáilte Ireland Tourist Information, Crescent Quay, Wexford, ☎ (053) 23111; fax 41743

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

Yola Farmstead Folk Park, on the N25 to Rosslare Europort, houses the official **Genealogical Centre** for County Wexford. The folk park represents 18th-century life, and features a forge, school house, working windmill, a mini-farm, and a craft shop; **Granny's Kitchen** serves good food. Open May-October, daily, 10 am-6 pm; March, April and November, Monday-Friday, 10 am-4:30 pm. ☎ (053) 32610; fax 32612; wexgen@eircom.net.

◆ Sightseeing

The **Irish National Heritage Park** is just outside Wexford Town at Ferrycarrig. In its 35 acres it covers 900 years of history, with replicas of Irish buildings, showing how people lived from the Stone Age to the Norman period. It's a good introduction to the country's history in a pleasant setting. There's a self-guided route and tours available. The ***Fulacht Fiadh*** **Restaurant** overlooks the *crannóg* (a house on a lake) and there's a craft shop. Open all year. ☎ (053) 20733.

Johnstown Castle

Johnstown Castle, Gardens and Irish Agricultural Museum is also near Wexford Town, off the N25 road to Rosslare. The castle isn't open, but you can take some pleasant walks in the gardens, woods and along the lake. You learn about rural life in the museum, which is in old farm buildings. The Environmental Protection Agency has an interactive exhibition here, open Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm. ☎ (053) 60600; g.ruane@epa.ie; www.epa.ie. The Irish Agricultural Museum is open Monday-Friday, 9 am to 5 pm all year, and from April to October, 2-5 pm, Saturday and Sunday. ☎ (053) 42888.

The **Wexford Wildfowl Reserve** is off the R742 to Curracloe, on the opposite shore of the Harbor from Wexford Town and in an area called the Slobs, known all over the world for the wild geese that winter here. About 10,000 Greenland white-fronted geese, a third of the world population, visit. The Reserve is in the care of the State Heritage Service and partly owned by BirdWatch Ireland. There's a Visitor Centre with exhibitions, as well as bird-watching. Open daily all year, from 9 am to 6 pm, Easter to end September; 10 am to 5 pm the rest of the year. Admission free. ☎ (053) 23129.

Our Lady's Island, which can be seen from off the N25 between Rosslare and Kilmore Quay, has been a religious site since before Christianity arrived. Annual pilgrimages are made here, and there are the ruins of an Augustinian priory on the island. The area has been designated of in-

ternational importance for its wildlife, and attracts bird-watchers. **Carnsore Point** nearby was to be the site of a nuclear plant in the 1970s, but so many people protested that it never went ahead.

Wexford Town

This Heritage Town was founded by the Vikings and developed by the Normans. It stands at the mouth of the harbor bearing its name. It's very cosmopolitan, with narrow streets and a long attractive quayside, and is famous all over the world for its annual Opera Festival held in the autumn. For over 50 years the **Wexford International Opera Festival** has attracted top performers and audiences from all over the country and overseas. It presents wonderful productions of rarely performed works, and an art festival has built up around it. The festival takes place in October at the Theatre Royal, High Street, ☎ (053) 22400, www.wexfordopera.com.

The town has entertainment year-round, including theater, light opera and exhibitions. It also has lots of craft shops and boutiques, plus plenty of coffee shops where you can take a break. Many of its pubs offer lunches and have traditional Irish music in the evenings. The **Wexford Arts Centre** is right in the center of town. It hosts exhibitions and other events, and has information about what's happening in the area. There's also a café where you can enjoy a snack. ☎ (053) 23764.

Allow time to explore the **Cornmarket**, **Bullring** and **Main Street**. There's an audio-visual presentation (hourly from 10 am to 4 pm) of the town's history at **Westgate**, one of its five medieval entrances.

New Ross

New Ross is on the N25 between Wexford and Waterford, attractively set on the joint estuary of the rivers Barrow and Nore. It's hilly, with narrow, medieval streets like those of Wexford. It's a welcoming town and there is so much to see in the surrounding area that you could spend at least a couple of days here. It's a busy port too, so you can watch boats coming and going, and there are two floating attractions on its quayside: the ***Galley*** cruising restaurant (see page 226 and *Where to Eat*, page 249) and the ***Dunbrody*** Famine ship, next page.

Dunbrody, *New Ross*

The *Dunbrody* is a full-scale replica of the ship that took the late President Kennedy's grandfather to the US. Your admission ticket is dated March 18, 1845, and you get an idea of conditions onboard for the emigrants as they set sail with hope of a new life in North America. There's a database of 2½ million passengers who traveled to the US in the period of 1845-1880 from all ports in Britain and Ireland. Open daily year-round; April to September, 9 am-6 pm; October to March, noon to 5 pm. ☎ (051) 425-239; fax 425-240; jfktrust@iol.ie; www.dunbrody.com.

South of New Ross is **Dunbrody Abbey**, a 12th-century Cistercian monastery between the R733 and R734. There's a huge maze of 1500 yews, a craft gallery and tea rooms. Open May, June, September, 10 am-6 pm; July-August, 10 am-7 pm. ☎ (051) 388-603.

THE KENNEDY CONNECTION

The **Kennedy Homestead** is at Dunganstown, just east of New Ross, off the R733. It's well signposted along a very narrow and winding road (take care). JFK's great-grandfather was born here and its visitor center celebrates five generations of the family. Open May, June and September, Monday to Friday, 11:30 am to 4:30 pm; July and August, daily, 10 am to 5:00 pm. ☎ (051) 388-264.

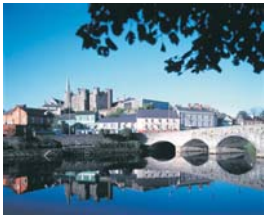
The **John Fitzgerald Kennedy Arboretum**, run by the State Heritage Service, is seven miles (11 km) south of New Ross off the R733. It's a plant collection displayed on 623 acres (252 hectares) of the southern slopes of Slieve Coillte, with 4,500 different trees and shrubs from temperate areas of the world. There's an interesting visitor center. Open daily all year from 10 am; April and September, to 6:30 pm; May-August, to 8 pm; October-March, to 5 pm. ☎ (051) 388-171.

Enniscorthy

Enniscorthy is northeast of New Ross on the N50, where it meets the N11 from Dublin. Standing on the River Slaney, it's dominated by a Norman castle, now the **County Museum**, which has displays of agricultural, military and domestic items. The town is very much associ-

ated with the 1798 Rebellion, and the home of the **National 1798 Visitor Centre**, which tells its story using the latest technology. Open daily. ☎ (054) 37596; 98com@iol.ie; www.1798centre.com.

Enniscorthy has been associated with the craft of pottery for centuries, and it's worth visiting **Carley's Bridge**, **Badger Hill** or **Kiltrea Pottery**.



Enniscorthy

Gorey

Gorey is a traditional market town, with many fine buildings. Outside the town is **Craanford Mills**, lovingly restored by the Lyons family, who give you a tour of the 17th-century water mill. It's a pleasant place to stop, with homemade food in the **Kiln Loft**. Look for signs to the mills on the N11 Dublin-Rosslare Road at **Camolin**, near Gorey. From Easter to late June and in September open weekends only, 2 to 6 pm; July and August open daily, dawn to dusk; ☎ (055) 28124.

Courtown Harbour

This is the main town in North Wexford and is only an hour's drive from Dublin. Visitors can enjoy watersports, walks, golf and equestrian activities, as well as plenty of evening entertainment. See www.northwexford.com/courtown.htm for details. There are lots of sandy beaches in the area, including a Blue Flag at Courtown.

Follow the R742 towards Wexford along the scenic coastline and you come to **Ballinskar**, where Spielberg filmed the opening scenes of *Saving Private Ryan*.

Rosslare

Rosslare, on the opposite side of Wexford Harbor, is not only an important port, it also has a Blue Flag beach and good facilities for watersports, golf courses, an equestrian center, and excellent hotels.

Around Wexford Town

There are two signposted driving tours southwest of Wexford: the Bannow Drive and the Ring of Hook, both suitable for bikes and cars.

The **Bannow Drive** starts at the little market town of Wellington Bridge on the R733, named after the Duke who defeated Napoleon at Waterloo. It covers about 20 miles (32 km), taking in the deserted medieval town of **Clonmines**, the island of **Bannow** where the Normans first landed in 1169, gorgeous views of **Bannow Bay**, and **Cullenstown Strand**.

Nearby is **Kilmore Quay**, a quaint fishing village with a row of thatched cottages and a harbor and marina. You'll see lots of fishing boats tied up and can enjoy seafood in the local pubs. The **Guillemot Maritime Museum** is in the unusual setting of a converted lightship. ☎ (051) 561-144.

Ring of Hook & Lighthouse Drive: The low lying Hook Peninsula forms the eastern boundary of Waterford Harbor and has a wonderfully wild landscape. The area is popular for wreck diving. On this coastal route you are surrounded by delightful coves and beaches, and pass many historic sites.

Hook Head Lighthouse
(Phil Armitage)

The **Hook Head Lighthouse**, one of the oldest in the world, is open to visitors, with a café and craft shop. Open daily, March-October, 9:30 am to 5:30 pm. Phone for winter times. ☎ (051) 397-055; thehook@eircom.net; www.thehook-wexford.com.

Near Saltmills you come to **Tintern Abbey**, founded about 1200 (it's named after the one in Wales, of the Wordsworth poem). You can see the remains of its nave, chancel, tower, chapel and cloister. There are lovely walks around it, and it has a tea room. Open mid-June to late September, 9:30 am-6 pm. ☎ (051) 562-650.

Fethard is the main village on the Hook Peninsula, its castle is an L-shaped fortified hall house built in the 15th century. The **Hook Tourist Office** is on its main street, ☎ (051) 397-502; hookinfo@iol.ie.

The fishing village of **Duncannon** has a beach, and is popular for deep-sea angling.

Duncannon Military Fort is star-shaped and stands on a strategically important promontory in Waterford Harbour, built in 1588 because an attack by the Spanish Armada was expected. There's a

Maritime Museum on site, a café and craft shop. Open April to October, the rest of the year by arrangement. ☎/fax (051) 389-454; duncannonfort@ireland.com; www.thehook-wexford.com/heritage.

◆ Adventures

On Foot

There's an eight-mile nature walk, called the **Three Rocks Trail**, which takes you through unspoiled countryside across Forth Mountain, passing historic landmarks and archaeological sites, with wonderful views. It starts at the ruins of Ferrycarrig Castle and ends at New Line Road, built in 1810 as the direct route from Duncannon Fort to Wexford Town.

The **Three Rocks Camp**, on the eastern end of Forth Mountain, is where the main body of rebels waited before one of the most important battles of the 1798 Rebellion. The rebels won, the troops left Wexford and on May 30 Ireland's first (short-lived) republic was declared.

From **Carrigfoyle Rock** there are panoramic views. Among the other sights you pass on the trail is **Jim Furlong's House**. It's a typical Forth Mountain dwelling, built of stone. He was a well-known fiddle player and people came here up to 50 years ago for music and dancing, so it was called a *céilí* house.

Céilí literally means "dance gathering" and the word is still used today to mean that – a place where people go to listen to Irish traditional music and dance to it.

OUTDOOR EDUCATION

The Shielbaggan Outdoor Education Centre caters to individuals as well as groups. It's open from February to the end of November, offering day and overnight activities, such as canoeing, climbing, windsurfing, sailing, orienteering and snorkeling. ☎/fax (051) 389-550; shielbaggan@eircom.

On Water

FISHING CHARTERS

Boat trips and charters are available from the pier at **Kilmore Quay**, ideal for angling, diving or sightseeing. Ask locally for tips about fishing and diving locations.

You can cruise around the bird sanctuary on the **Saltee Islands** from Kilmore Quay on board the ***Saltee Princess***. Contact Declan Bates, ☎ (053) 29684. June is the best month, but cruises operate from March to October.

There are a number of other places where boats can be chartered, among them the following.

South East Charters, Duncannon, New Ross, for wreck and shark fishing, general sea angling, and relaxing cruises. Fishing rod rental available. ☎ (051) 389-242; hookinfo@iol.ie.

Sea Angling Centre, Kilmore Quay, ☎ (053) 45227

The Enterprise, for deep-sea angling, reef and shark fishing off the southeast coast, plus scenic trips around Saltee Islands. ☎ (053) 29704.

Mermaid Angling, vessel *Wild Swan*, based at Ballyhack Harbor, available for fishing trips and river cruises, ☎ (051) 389-225; mermaidangling@hotmail.com.

SWIMMING

If you want to go swimming, but prefer indoor pools to beaches, there's lots of choice, including the following:

Aqua Club at Kelly's Resort Hotel, Rosslare Strand, with two pools.☎ (053) 32114; www.kellys.ie

Forest Park Leisure Centre, Courtown Harbor, with a 25-meter pool. ☎ (055) 24849; www.holohan.ie

Enniscorthy Swimming Pool Leisure Complex, ☎ (054) 34443

Ferrybank Swimming Pool, Wexford, ☎ (053) 43274

New Ross Kennedy Memorial Pool, ☎ (051) 421-169

There is a **cairn**, or prehistoric burial mound, near the Skeater Rock. This viewing point gives a commanding view of the South Wexford and East Waterford coastline and was used as a lookout in 1798.

On Horseback

Shelmalier Riding Stables, Forth Mountain, Trinity, Taghmon, is only five miles (eight km) from Wexford Town, in the middle of forests and mountains, and offers lessons and scenic rides. ☎ (053) 39251.

Curracloe House is eight miles (13 km) northeast of Wexford, close to Enniscorthy and to the Raven pine forest and sand dunes. Here you can enjoy a canter on the beach or a trek through the Sloblands. All levels of rider welcome. ☎ (053) 37582.

At the **Glenmoor Riding School**, Ramstown, Fethard-on-Sea, beach rides are very popular, and they cater specially to nervous or first-time riders. ☎ (051) 397-313.

A RIDING VACATION

Based in a historic house on a working farm, the **Horetown Equestrian Centre**, Foulksmills, offers riding trips that cater to all, but especially those who have some riding experience. A fine cellar restaurant is part of its charm. ☎ (051) 565-786; iyoung@indigo.ie; www.horetownhouse.com.

◆ Golf

All of the area's courses are listed on www.southeastireland.com.

- **Ballymoney Golf Club**, Gorey. ☎ (055) 25413
- **Courtown Golf Club**, Courtown Harbor, Gorey. ☎ (055) 25166
- **New Ross Golf Club**. ☎ (051) 421-433
- **Rosslare Golf Club**, Rosslare Strand. ☎ (053) 32203
- **St. Helen's Bay Golf Club**, Rosslare Harbor. ☎ (053) 33234
- **Wexford Golf Club**. ☎ (053) 45095
- **Enniscorthy Golf Club**. ☎ (054) 33191

◆ Spectator Sports

Both **Gaelic football** and **hurling** are popular in Wexford, and matches are held most weekends in villages and towns. There's **greyhound racing** at the **Show Grounds Enniscorthy**, every Monday and Thursday from 8 pm. ☎ (054) 33172.

Wexford Racecourse is just outside of town, off the Dublin-Rosslare bypass. ☎ (053) 43412.

◆ Where to Stay

For accommodations pricing guide, see page 195.

Hotels

☆☆ **Hotel Curracloe** is in a lovely location, next to sandy beaches and close to the North Slobs Bird Sanctuary and Nature Reserve, yet only five miles from Wexford town. It has 29 bedrooms and a pub, and its **Blake Restaurant and Carvery** offers great choice. Rates from $$. ☎ (053) 37308; fax 37587; hotelcurracloe@eircom.net, www.hotelcurracloe.com.

☆☆ **The Pines Hotel** is just outside the village of Camolin and 11 miles from Enniscorthy. It's small (11 bedrooms) and family-run, and is on a lovely large site, surrounded by woodland. Its restaurant specializes in exotic dishes, using local produce, and there's also a bar. It also has a well-equipped Fitness Centre, including a plunge pool. From $$ with special packages available. ☎ (054) 83600; fax 83588; thepines@eircom.net www.pinescountryhousehotel.com.

The Talbot Hotel is on the Quay in Wexford Town. Its 132 attractive bedrooms include a penthouse suite with panoramic views. It has a Leisure Centre, housed in an old mill, with gym and swimming pool. The **Ballast Bank Bar & Grill** looks out over the River Slaney, and has an interesting menu; there's live music Thursday to Saturday. The **Oyster Lane Restaurant** offers imaginative choices, and specializes in local produce. Rates from $$ with special offers available. ☎ (053) 22566; fax 23377; sales@talbothotel.ie www.talbothotel.ie.

☆☆☆☆ **Kellys Resort Hotel**, Rosslare, is popular all year round with the Irish, as it has excellent indoor and outdoor facilities and also runs a program of short courses outside the main tourist season on topics as diverse as art appreciation, gardening, and golf. Since 1895 it has welcomed guests, and today the fourth successive generation of Kellys are in charge. It has a very attractive setting, overlooking a sandy beach. Facilities include: two indoor/outdoor tennis courts, a squash court, indoor golf practice area, table tennis, snooker, badminton, bowls, jogging track, Aqua Club with two pools, sauna, steam

room, Jacuzzi, outdoor Canadian hot tub, and a fully equipped gym. You can also rent bikes.

It also has an award-winning restaurant and a more casual bar/bistro called **La Marine**. Both have extensive menus that use the finest local produce – including fresh fish from Kilmore Quay, Wexford beef and the hotel's own lamb. $$. ☎ (053) 32114; fax 32222; kellyhot@iol.ie; www.kellys.ie.

☆☆☆ **The Creacon Lodge Hotel**, Creacon, New Ross, is in a home dating from the 1840s and care has been taken to retain its country house atmosphere. All bedrooms are individually decorated, and guests can relax in the beautiful gardens or beside the log fires. Its restaurant serves interesting food prepared with local produce. $$. ☎ (051) 421-897; fax 422-560; info@creaconlodge.com; www.creaconlodge.com.

☆☆☆ **The Cedar Lodge Hotel and Restaurant**, New Ross, is an elegant family-run hotel close to interesting and historic sites, including the John F. Kennedy Memorial Park, the Irish National Heritage Park, Dunbrody Abbey, Johnstown Castle Gardens and Wexford Wildfowl Reserve. Its restaurant is noted for freshly prepared local produce, and is recommended by the leading good food guides. $$. ☎ (051) 428-386; fax 428-222; cedarlodge@eircom.ie; www.prideofeirehotels.com.

Guesthouses

☆☆☆☆ **Richmond House**, on the outskirts of Cappoquin, was originally built in 1704, and has now been refurbished as a Country House restaurant with 10 rooms available. Each has period furniture, and combines Georgian elegance with modern comforts. The food is outstanding, with all the ingredients local. $$, with special weekend rates that include dinner. ☎ (058) 54278; www.amireland.com/richmond.

Ballinkeele House, Ballymurn, Enniscorthy, is a member of Hidden Ireland. It is surrounded by 350 acres of parkland with a number of lakes and ponds and plenty of mature trees. It was built in 1840 as the home of the Maher family, whose descendants still live here, surrounded by the original furniture. There are only five bedrooms, so staying here is very special. Margaret Maher is a member of Euro Toques, which means she is a very accomplished cook, so dining

here is memorable. Fishing, riding, and golf are all available locally, as well as beaches, including Curracloe. $$. ☎ (053) 38105; info@ballinkeele.com; www.ballinkeele.com.

Cottage Rentals

The Self Catering Ireland organization is based in Rosslare and has a number of properties in the county. ☎ (053) 33999; info@selfcatering-ireland.com; www.selfcatering-ireland.com.

Irish Cottage Holiday Homes has three groups of houses in the county. A central reservation service for cottages is available at ☎ (01) 205-2777; fax 293-3025; cottage@irishcottageholidays.com.

Hostels

Macmurrough Farm Hostel, New Ross, open March to the end of November. ☎ (051) 421-383; hostel@macmurrough.com.

Kirwan House, Mary Street, Wexford Town, open February to mid-December. ☎ (053) 21208.

The **Irish Youth Hostel Association** has two hostels, at Rosslare and Arthurstown. See their Web site at www.irelandyha.org.

Camping & RV Parks

☆☆☆ **Ocean Island Park**, Fethard-on-Sea, New Ross, open Easter to the end of September, is in a quiet setting within easy walking distance of sandy beaches. Some facilities only open July and August. ☎ (051) 397-148.

☆☆☆☆ **Morriscastle Strand Park**, Kilmuckbridge, is on the coast, south of Gorey and north of Wexford, with excellent facilities, including tennis courts on site. It does not accept tents. Open May to the end of September. ☎ (053) 30124; camacmorriscastle@eircom.net.

☆☆ **St. Margaret's Beach Park**, Our Lady's Island, Rosslare. It's in a rural area near a safe beach and is open mid-March to mid-October. ☎/fax (053) 31169; stmarg@indigo.ie.

☆☆☆☆ **The Trading Post** is at Ballaghkeen, 10 minutes from Wexford, and open April to end September. Facilities include campers' kitchen, TV room, laundry, plus a delicatessen and shop in its service station. ☎ (053) 27368; thetradingpost@eircom.net.

◆ Where to Eat

The Farmer's Kitchen, on the Rosslare Road a couple of miles outside Wexford, serves good value meals, with a choice of bar menu and à la carte restaurant. ☎ (053) 43295.

A memorable place to dine in the evening is at the **Fulacht Fiádh Restaurant**, which is in the Irish National Heritage Park, just outside Wexford. Full à la carte and early bird menu available; open til 5:30 pm. ☎ (053) 20733.

La Marine Bar at Kelly's Resort Hotel, Rosslare, is open for lunch and dinner, serving French and European dishes, and has a relaxing atmosphere. ☎ (053) 32114.

Tims Tavern, 51 South Main Street, Wexford, serves food from noon to midnight, including steaks, vegetarian, seafood, modern Irish and French dishes, good value. ☎ (053) 23861.

Silver Fox Seafood Restaurant, Kilmore Quay, also serves vegetarian and Irish dishes. Open from 12.30- 9.30pm daily. ☎ (053) 29888.

The **Galley Cruising Restaurants**, based at the Quay, New Ross (also embarks from Waterford), runs from May through October; ☎ (051) 421-723; fax 421-950; info@rivercruises.ie, www.rivercruises.ie.

County Tipperary

Tipperary is the largest inland county in the Republic and lies in one of the most fertile parts of the island, its land mainly devoted to dairy farming. Its central limestone plain is called the **Golden Vale**, and is surrounded by mountain ranges, the **Galtees** and the **Knockmealdowns** to the south, the **Silvermines** and **Arra Mountains** on the west, with **Devil's Bit Mountain** in the north and the **Slieveardagh Hills** and Slievenamon in the southeast. Its main rivers include the Shannon, Little Brosna, Nenagh, Nore, Suir and Moyle, with its main lake Lough Derg on the Shannon.

The **Rock of Cashel** is the county's most prominent historical site, dominating the landscape from its rocky outcrop 200 feet above the surrounding countryside. It is best appreciated if first seen by approaching it from the north on the road from Dublin, ideally at sunset,

Rock of Cashel, Tipperary

a sight you will not forget. The Rock was the center of religious and secular life in Munster from the end of the 4th century until medieval times; among its impressive buildings is **Cormac's Chapel**, with its unique carvings and arches.

The Kings of Munster ruled from here until Brian Boru came to power, and in 1101 it was handed over to the church. When the Normans arrived, the county was given to the Butlers.

The Cromwellian Plantation (see page 12) was disastrous for the natives here, as everywhere else, and led to them supporting movements like the Whiteboys and later the Fenians – so it became known as "Turbulent Tipperary."

It's the only Irish county to be divided into two ridings for administrative purposes (the word "riding" is derived from Old English *thriding*, meaning "third part"), with **Nenagh** the capital of the North Riding and **Clonmel**, also its largest town, the capital of the South Riding. This arrangement dates back to the mid-19th century, when the county had one of the biggest populations. Its other main towns include **Cahir**, **Roscrea** and **Tipperary Town**.

Tipperary offers tranquil, unspoiled countryside and fresh clean waters, perfect for walking and fishing, with the mountains and valleys providing spectacular drives and walks. Lough Derg is a lovely location for cruising trips and watersports.

It's an important equestrian area, with racecourses at Thurles, Clonmel and Tipperary Town. There are many racing stables and studs in the county, including the world-famous **Coolmore Stud** in Fethard, and **Ballydoyle Stables** at Rosegreen.

The county is known the world over for the song from World War I that begins "*It's a long way to Tipperary*…."

NOT TO SCALE

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1. Round Tower, High Cross, St. Cronan's Church, Norman Castle, Damer House, Leap Castle
2. Castle of the de Butlers of Ormond
3. Golden Vale
4. Famine Museum, Holy Cross Abbey, Farney Castle, Ballinhow Castle
5. Rock of Cashel, Cormac's Chapel, Dominic's Abbey, Hore Abbey
6. Old St. Mary's Church, Abbey of St. Francis, Tipperary South Riding Museum
7. Tipperary Crystal
8. Mitchelstown Caves
9. Vee Gap

Railway Lines

◆ Getting Here

Clonmel is served by major roads N24-N76-N77-N78-N9-N7 from Dublin (102 miles/164 km); N24-N8-N25 from Cork (60 miles/97 km).

There are railway stations at Carrick-on-Suir, Clonmel, Cahir, Tipperary, on the Waterford line. Connection can be made at Limerick Junction, close to Tipperary Town, to the main Dublin-Cork line. There are stations on that line at Thurles and Templemore.

It is also well served by Bus Éireann, the national bus company.

◆ Tourist Information

Two regional tourism organizations market Co. Tipperary – for South Tipperary, contact **South East Tourism**, ☎ (051) 875-823, info@southeasttourism.ie; and for North Tipperary, contact **Shannon Development**, www.shannonregiontourism.ie.

There are tourist information offices at **Cahir Castle**, on Castle Street, open March to October, ☎ (052) 41453; **Cashel Heritage Centre**, Main Street, open daily, 9:30 am to 5:30 pm, mid-March to mid-November; in winter Monday to Friday only; ☎ (062) 62511/61333; info@casheltouristoffice.com; **Clonmel Community Tourist Office**, Nelson Street, ☎ (052) 22960; **Nenagh Heritage Centre**, open year-round; Monday to Friday, 9:30 am to 5 pm; Saturday hours mid-May to mid-September; closed Christmas Day; ☎ (067) 33850.

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

There are two genealogy centers. The **Tipperary North Family Research Centre** is in Nenagh, in The Governor's House, Kickham Street. ☎ (067) 33850; tippnorthgenealogy@eircom.net. The **Tipperary South Family Research Centre** is in Cashel, in the Brú Ború Cultural Centre, under the Rock. ☎ (062) 61122; bruboru@comhaltas.com; www.comhaltas.com. **Family History Research** in Excel Center, Mitchell Street, Tipperary, open Mon-Fri, 9.30am-5.30pm. ☎ (062) 80520; research@tfhr.org www.tfhr.org.

◆ Sightseeing

Clonmel

Clonmel is in the southeastern corner of the county, on the banks of the Suir. Its Irish name, *Cluain Meala*, is evocative, meaning "pasture of honey." Vikings may have sailed up the Suir and settled here. It was walled by the Normans in the 14th century and protected by Maurice Fitzgerald, First Earl of Desmond, who brought the Dominicans and Franciscans to the town. In 1650 it was attacked by Cromwell and surrendered.

By the 19th century, Clonmel had become a busy market town, milling cereals, with a cotton factory and its own army barracks. A unique development here was Charles Bianconi's national mail coach system, which started from Hearn's Hotel in 1815.

Today, Clonmel is a prosperous and attractive town. Among its sights are the **old town walls**, **Old St. Mary's Church**, the **Abbey of St. Francis**, and the **West Gate** (built in 1831 on the site of the original). It's also well worth visiting the **Tipperary South Riding Museum**, where you can see artifacts associated with local events and characters, including Bianconi.

Nenagh

Nenagh is near the shores of Lough Derg, and overlooking its center, almost intact, is the **castle of the de Butlers of Ormond**. By the middle of the 19th century, Nenagh had become a busy market town with a barracks. Today, it prospers due to multinational companies locating nearby.

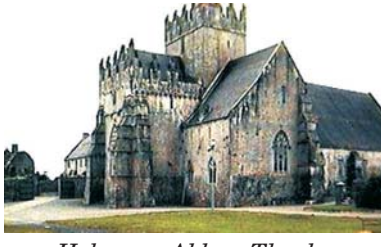
Ormond Castle

Thurles

Thurles, in the middle of this huge county, is divided in two by the River Suir. It was founded by the Norman Butlers, and you can still

see remains of their **fortresses**, with the 15th-century **tower house** guarding the bridge. On the square is the former home of Lady Thurles, mother of the First Duke of Ormond.

Hayes Hotel is where the GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association) was founded (see page 262, *Where to Stay*) and there's a statue of its first patron, Archbishop Croke (Croke Park in Dublin is named after him). **St. Mary's Church of Ireland** now houses the **Famine Museum**, open on Sundays and Bank Holidays from 2-6 pm or by appointment. Contact George Willoughby. ☎ (0504) 21133.



Holycross Abbey, Thurles

One of the most picturesque Christian monuments in Ireland, with a charming setting on the bank of the River Suir about 4½ miles south of Thurles, is **Holycross Abbey**. It dates from the early 12th century and took its name from a portion of the true cross, enshrined here. It was restored in the 1970s and is an interesting place to visit, whether you're religious or not. There are a variety of fascinating windows, mural paintings and many fine carvings to see here. Mass is still celebrated regularly; see Web site for schedule. Gift shop open daily from May to September, closed Saturdays the rest of the year. ☎ (0504) 43241, www.holycrossabbey.ie.

Tipperary Town

Tipperary is one of Ireland's Heritage Towns, an Anglo-Norman settlement that lies in the middle of the Golden Vale, with land the envy of farmers in other parts of the country. It was the scene of many violent incidents during the Land Wars of the 1880s. It has some attractive old buildings and is very much a traditional Irish town. It's close to Co. Limerick in the southwestern corner of the county, and south of it are the Slievenamuck and Galtee Mountains, and the Glen of Aherlow, perfect for hiking and sightseeing.

Cahir

Cahir Castle

Cahir is bypassed by one of the Republic's busiest roads, the N8, and is a pleasure to visit. The town is dominated by **Cahir Castle**, which is open for visits.

Morrissey's Pub, on the street near the castle, has live music in the evenings. During the season, the **Tourist Office** is open and there's always lots of parking behind it on the bank of the River Suir. Cahir is a lovely base for a vacation. It has a good deal of charm, with some traditional shopfronts and a wide main square on two levels. At one time Protestants and Catholics shared a church with just a curtain between them, very unusual, but a sign of something special about its people.

You can follow a heritage trail around the town, and there's also a delightful riverside walk through **Inch Field** beside Cahir Castle. From here, you can walk to **Swiss Cottage**, just over a mile away on the Clonmel Road. It really is delightful: a thatched cottage orné, which looks like something from a fairytale. It was built in the early 1800s as a summerhouse for the Earl of Glengall and has a spiral staircase and dear little rooms. Open year-round; April to mid-October, daily, 10 am to 6 pm; closed Mondays in winter and limited hours in December. ☎ (052) 41144.

Roscrea Castle

Roscrea

Roscrea is close to Tipperary's border with Offaly and Laois. It's one of the country's Heritage Towns, and no wonder. It has some of the finest examples of Irish architecture, spanning 600 years, and all within a small area. There's a **round tower**, **high cross**, **St. Cronan's Church** with its Romanesque façade, the recently restored Norman **Roscrea Castle**, plus the 18th-century **Damer House**, which is now the heritage center. You can visit

the castle, which is furnished and houses exhibitions. So does Damer House. They are open from March to late October, daily, 10 am to 6 pm. ☎ (0505) 21850; fax 21904.

The picturesque and interesting **Leap Castle**, which is said to be the most haunted castle in the country, is four miles (6.4 km) north of Roscrea. The castle is open to visitors and Ryan family who live there host medieval banquets. It was originally the home of the fierce O'Carroll clan. ☎ (0509) 31115.

South of Roscrea on the N62 is **Templemore**. You'll notice its very wide street, attractive in places, but unfortunately some of the buildings are ugly examples of '60s architecture. The national training center for the Republic's police force (***An Garda Siochana*** – literally, "the guardians of the peace") dominates the town. The original barracks was built in 1810 to take 1,000 men, and around it more recent buildings have been added.

Continuing south, turn to the left off the N62 and you come to the delightful little quiet village of **Loughmore**, which is popular for fishing.

Around Tipperary

There are a number of signposted drives that include the **Glen of Aherlow**, the **Knockmealdown Mountains**, the **Premier Drive**, the **Slievenamon**, the **Bianconi Drive**, the **Suir**, **The Vee**, **Ballyporeen**, **Clogheen Drive** and **Cahir Drive**. Look for the distinctive signs, brown with white lettering. See www.southeastireland.com and www.shannonregiontourism.ie for details of routes, suitable for driving or cycling.

An easy way of exploring the county is by driving or cycling around, and there's a very useful little guidebook with other suggested routes, written by Donal and Nancy Murphy. It is published by the tourism bodies for the county and is well worth its €3 price. All the routes are circular, so you can start them anywhere. Do remember to check your gas before heading off, if you're driving, and don't get stranded as I almost did. Away from the main roads there aren't a lot of gas stations!

Tour 1 (86 miles/138 km) takes in the western part of the county and includes the signposted **Lough Derg Drive**. You could start it in Nenagh or Roscrea. It passes through pretty villages, among them Terryglass and its quay, Riverstown, just south of Birr in neighboring

Offaly, Kilgarvan Quay, and Borrisokane, where there's a ring fort. You travel through parkland, bog and pasture, with lovely views of the Lough, and come across a variety of historic ruins and monastic remains.

Tour 2 (75 miles/121 km) is south of Nenagh, and journeys along the Lough Derg Drive part of the way. En route is **Ballina**, the pretty village twinned with Killaloe on the other side of the Lough. You travel up and down hills, on delightful winding roads, which again give panoramic views of the Shannon's largest lake.

Tour 3 (70 miles/113 km) is around Thurles, and includes the memorably named hamlet of **Horse and Jockey**, a landmark on the Cork-Dublin main road, where there's a pub/restaurant/craft shop of the same name, a good place to stop for refreshments, very moderately priced. The drive takes in part of the wonderful Golden Vale, with an optional diversion to Devil's Bit Mountain.

Tour 4 is in two parts, which, combined, take in two of the best-known and most interesting sites, the **Rock of Cashel** and **Holycross**, and the towns of Tipperary, Cashel and Thurles, plus attractive villages like Thomastown and Cappawhite.

Tour 5 (73 miles/118 km) could be started at Cashel or Cahir. Its highlights include the planned estate village of Marlfield, Cahir, Rockwell, the Vee Gap, which climbs into the **Knockmealdown Mountains** and on into Co. Waterford, where there are amazing views from the summit, if the weather is good.

The Vee is even more spectacular if approached from the Waterford side, where you pass the remote **Mount Melleray monastery** as you drive or cycle up to it from Cappoquin.

Tour 6 (60 miles/97 km) takes you around Tipperary Town to Bansha, through the Glen of Aherlow, to Galbally. Along the way you can stop at a number of places, including the Mitchelstown Caves, and Ballyporeen, where the grandfather of former US President Ronald Reagan lived, and which he visited.

Tour 7 (82 miles/132 km) goes through Clonmel, Carrick-on-Suir and Fethard, and is dominated by the River Suir, the Comeragh Mountains, the Slieveardagh Hills and their surrounding bogland. You circle Slievenamon ("the women's hill").

◆ Adventures

On Foot

In addition to the walks in and around Cahir, detailed above, there's a town trail of **Cashel**, which is a pleasant town, once you get away from its main street, which is choked with heavy traffic. At **Dundrum**, there are forest walks and there's another trail to follow nearby at **Marl Lake**.

There are heritage trails to follow in **Clonmel** and in the medieval walled village of **Fethard**; there's a walk through the **Wilderness Gorge** at Clonmel; plus others at **Kilcash**, including one of **Slievenamon**.

FOREST PARKS

There are a number of forest parks, including **Bansha Wood**, on the Cahir-Tipperary road (N24); **Glengarra Wood**, on the N8, south of Cahir; and **Killballyboy**, on the Clogheen to Lismore R668, which was a famine relief road.

LONG-DISTANCE WALKS

The **Tipperary Heritage Way** (35 miles/56km) connecting Kilmoyler, at the Vee Gap in the Knockmealdown Mountains, with Cashel.

Part of the **Slieve Felim Way**, which runs from Murroe, Co. Limerick, to Silvermines.

The closing stages of the **Lough Derg Way**, which starts in Limerick City and ends at Dromineer.

Part of the **Blackwater Way** (105 miles/168km) between Clogheen and Glenflesk near Killarney, Co. Kerry, passing through Co. Cork. Details of routes on www.walkireland.ie.

On Water

BOATING

Shannon Sailing, New Harbor, Dromineer, Nenagh, runs courses in windsurfing, dinghy and big boat sailing. It also operates sailing yachts from Foynes on the Shannon Estuary. ☎ (067) 24295. See listings for boating under Killaloe, Co. Clare, pages 338 and 356, for details of facilities on the other side of the bridge.

FISHING

Two regional fishery organizations look after Tipperary – the Southern Region and the Shannon Region. The **Southern Region** is based in Clonmel, ☎ (052) 80055, srfb@srfb.ie. The **Shannon** is in Limerick, ☎ (061) 455-171, and its Web site is excellent – www.shannon-fishery-board.ie.

Kavanaghs Sports Shop, Upper O'Connell Street, Clonmel has permits for the local area of the River Suir. ☎ (052) 21279.

TJ's Angling Centre, Main Street, Ballina/Killaloe, for bait, tackle hire and guides; ☎ (061) 376-009, info@tjsangling.com www.tjsangling.com.

☆☆☆☆ **Waterside Cottages and Angling Centre** on Dromineer Bay, has everything needed for fishing, including boat rental. There are 11 rustic cottages, and a tennis court on site. ☎ (067) 24432; watersidecottages@eircom.net, www.watersidecottages.ie.

☆☆☆☆ **Tomona Lodge**, Ballycommon, Nenagh, sleeps eight, on the harbor, with a day cruiser available for rent. ☎ (067) 24376; valentinecope@eircom.net.

Dromineer, five miles (eight km) from Nenagh on the eastern shore of Lough Derg, is one of the main angling centers in the county. It's considered a good base both for pike and coarse fish, mainly bream.

For more information, contact the Angling Section of the **Shannon Regional Board**, ☎ (0509) 21777; (Brian McManus at) info@shannon-fishery-board.ie.

Ashley Park House, near Nenagh, is an 18th-century country house offering B&B accommodations. Set on 76 acres of beech woodland and formal gardens, the historic house is on the shores of Lough Ourna, a private trout fishing lake and bird sanctuary. Guests have private access to the lake, with boats provided. ☎ (067) 38223; margaret@ashleypark.com; www.ashleypark.com.

On Horseback

Stay at the **Kilcooley Abbey Country and Equestrian Centre**, Thurles, which has 950 acres of woodland and a 10-acre lake. ☎ (056) 883-4222; kilcooly@indigo.ie.

Ballyporeen Stables is in lovely countryside near the Galtee Mountains, and welcomes riders at all levels. ☎ (052) 67617.

Homeleigh Farm House in the Glen of Aherlow has horseback riding and pony trekking on the farm and along forest trails. The property also has five guest rooms; ☎ (062) 56228, www.homeleighfarmhouse.com.

The Hyland Family, owners of the **Cahir Equestrian Centre**, will organize a riding trip for you, where you can trek through Cahir Park and enjoy riding along the banks of the River Suir. They also organize fishing trips on the river, or golf breaks, so if your party has different interests, this could be ideal. The Centre is on the Ardfinnan Road, Cahir, and has a café and a garden. ☎/fax (052) 41426.

Racecourses

Tipperary Racecourse. Limerick Junction, near Tipperary Town. ☎ (062) 51357; info@tipperaryraces.ie; www.tipperaryraces.ie

Thurles Racecourse. ☎ (0504) 23272, fax 24565; www.thurlesraces.ie; thurles@iol.ie

Clonmel Racecourse. ☎ (052) 72481, fax 26446; www.clonmelraces.ie, info@clonmelraces.ie

◆ Golf

- *The **Tipperary Golf Club** has the lovely backdrop of the Galtee Mountains, and is just outside the town on the road to the Glen of Aherlow. ☎ (062) 51119*

- ***Ballykisteen Golf & Country Club**, Monard, Limerick Junction. ☎ (062) 33333*
- ***Clonmel Golf Club**, Lyreanearla, Mountain Road. ☎ (052) 32213*
- ***County Tipperary Golf & Country Club**, Dundrum House Hotel, Dundrum, Cashel. ☎ (062) 71116*
- ***Nenagh Golf Club**. ☎ (067) 31476*
- ***Roscrea Golf Club**. ☎ (0505) 21130*
- ***Templemore Golf Club**. ☎ (0504) 31400*
- ***Thurles Golf Club**. ☎ (0504) 21983*
- ***Cahir Park Golf Club**. ☎ (052) 41474*

◆ Where to Stay

Hotels

ACCOMMODATIONS

$ . . . . . under $60
$$. $61-120
$$$. $121-182
$$$$. $183-243
$$$$$. . . . . over $244

☆☆☆☆ The **Cashel Palace Hotel** is in the center of Cashel, hidden away from the busy main street behind attractive entrance gates. It's set in 28 acres of gardens, which are older than the house itself, including two Mulberry trees planted in 1702 to mark the coronation of Queen Anne in England. There's a private path leading from the hotel directly to the Rock of Cashel (see page 250), called the Bishop's Walk after Archbishop Bolton, whose palace this was. The hotel has 23 bedrooms, individually furnished, with 10 others in the former Coach House, called the Mews, and all of them are beautiful.

For those interested in fishing, the hotel owns a five-mile (eight-km) stretch of the River Suir, and in season can arrange hunting and shooting, there are also several golf courses to choose from within driving distance.

Light meals are available in **The Guinness Bar** from noon to 8 pm, Monday to Thursday, and until 6 pm from Friday to Sunday. **The Bishop's Buttery Restaurant** (see below under *Where to Eat*) has vaulted ceilings and a huge open fireplace. $$$$ in main house; $$$ in Mews. ☎ (062) 62707; fax 61521; reception@cashel-palace.ie; www.cashel-palace.ie.

☆☆☆ **Grants Hotel** is on Castle Street in the center of Roscrea and its 25 pleasant rooms have recently been refurbished. On-site are **Kitty's Kitchen & Bistro**, open from 8 am to 10 pm; and the **Lemon Tree Restaurant**, open for lunch from 12:30-2:30 and for dinner from 6:30-9:30 pm. $$. ☎ (0505) 23300; fax 23209; grantshotel@eircom.net; www.grantshotel.com.

☆☆☆ **Dundrum House Hotel Golf and Leisure Club** is an elegant manor, built in 1730, which has been transformed into a beautiful and luxurious hotel, with its own 18-hole golf course and award-winning health and leisure club. There are 86 bedrooms, including six luxury family apartments and two penthouse suites. Guests can eat

in the dining room or in the **Venue Grillroom**, renowned for its excellent food. It's also known for the peaceful and relaxing atmosphere. $$$. ☎ (062) 71116; www.dundrumhousehotel.com.

☆☆ The **Glen Hotel** is a small family-run hotel in a beautiful location that's comfortable, and very good value. It's in the Glen of Aherlow, just south of Tipperary Town, between Galbally and Bansha. It has 24 rooms and a bar that's popular with locals for weddings and other functions, so ask for a room at the back, unless you want to join in the celebrations. The atmosphere is welcoming, with a real fire in the little sitting area near the dining room. Riding, golf, fishing, and bike rental available nearby. $. ☎ (062) 56146.

☆☆ **Hayes Hotel**, Thurles, was founded as The Star & Garter in the 18th century, it's famous as the place where, on November 1, 1884, a group of men met and founded the GAA – the Gaelic Athletic Association. It's right in the middle of Thurles, on Liberty Square, and is a good place for a drink, meal, and perhaps a chat. This is a popular spot even for those not interested in sport. Carvery lunch daily, noon to 5 pm; bistro meals 5 to 10 pm. Live music in the Cusack Bar on Saturday evenings. $$. ☎ (0504) 22122; fax 24516; info@hayeshotel.com; www.hayeshotel.com.

Bansha Castle Country Home dates from 1760. Its setting, in the Glen of Aherlow surrounded by 40 acres of private grounds, gardens and woodland, is delightful. It offers accommodation on a B&B basis, with candlelit dinner also available. The house can also be rented for a minimum of two nights. Excellent value for a memorable stay, rate from $. ☎ (062) 54187; fax 54294; johnrus@iol.ie www.banshacastle.com.

Camping & RV Parks

☆☆☆☆ **Ballinacourty House Park**, Glen of Aherlow, is open late March to the end of September. The park is set in the grounds if an 18th-century stable. Its facilities include a restaurant, but guests must make reservations. ☎ (062) 56559; info@ballinacourtyhse.com; www.ballinacourtyhse.com.

☆☆☆ **The Apple Park**, Moorstown, is beside the N24 close to Cahir, is on a fruit farm, hence its name, and guests can try some of the fruit or the farm-pressed apple juice. It's open from May to the end of September. Facilities include a tennis court, with rackets avail-

able free. ☎ (052) 41459; con@theapplefarm.com; www.theapplefarm.com.

☆☆☆ **Carrick-on-Suir Park**, Kilkenny Road, open from March to the end of October, is in a lovely rural setting, a five-minute walk from town with views of the mountains. Fishing is available free, and mobile homes are available for rent on site. ☎ (051) 640-461; coscamping@eircom.net; www.coscamping.com.

☆☆☆ **Parsons Green**, Clogheen, stays open all year. There's a farm museum and coffee shop. Guests can walk in its gardens or take a ride in the pony cart or try a boat on the river. ☎ (052) 65290; kathleennoonan@oceanfree.net; www.clogheen.com.

☆☆☆ **Streamstown** is just off the N7 to Nenagh, outside Roscrea. It's on a dairy farm and offers free hot showers, and facilities include a TV room and pool table. It's open from late March to early October. ☎ (0505) 21519; streamstowncaravanpark@eircom.net.

☆ **Power's the Pot**, Harney's Cross, Clonmel, on the R678 Clonmel-to-Rathgormack road. The park opens from May to the end of September. It's on the side of the Comeragh Mountains, so is ideal for walkers. There's a wine bar on site with a turf fire and facilities include free hot showers. ☎ (052) 23085; powersthepot@eircom.net.

The **Glen of Aherlow Caravan and Camping Park** is right in the middle of the Glen, between the Galtees and the Slievenamuck Hills. Open all year. This is a new park and is as yet unclassified under the star system. ☎ (062) 56555; rdrew@eircom.net; www.tipperarycamping.com.

Hostels

Cashel Holiday Hostel, John Street, is open all year. ☎ (062) 62330; info@cashelhostel.com; www.cashelhostel.com.

O'Briens Holiday Lodge, Dundrum Road, Cashel, is open all year, ☎ (062) 61003.

Lisakyle Hostel, Cahir, is open from March to the end of October. ☎ (052) 41963.

Lough Derg House Hostel, Nenagh, stays open all year. ☎ (067) 24958.

◆ Where to Eat

☆☆☆☆ **Cashel Palace** serves the finest of modern Irish cuisine in its Bishop's Buttery Restaurant, using herbs from the hotel's garden and the best local ingredients. It's open for lunch from 12:30 to 2:30 pm, Monday to Saturday, and for dinner from 6-9:30, Sunday to Friday, and until 10 pm on Saturdays. A pianist entertains diners on Friday and Saturday nights. Booking is advised for Sunday lunch, served in the Palace Suite. ☎ (062) 62707; reception@cashel-palace.ie; www.cashel-palace.ie.

The **Crock of Gold Café**, across the road from Cahir Castle, serves great food at very low prices; downstairs is a gift and card shop. Do try their Irish stew. It's a good place to stop if exploring the area, and there's plenty of parking available. ☎ (052) 41951.

Niamh's Restaurant, Mitchel Street, Clonmel, serves good value snacks and meals, open Monday to Saturday from 9am to 5:45pm (til 5pm on Saturday). ☎ (052) 25698.

Knocklofty Restaurant is in the west wing of Knocklofty Country House Hotel, four miles (6.4 km) from Clonmel on the road to Ardfinnan. The award-winning restaurant looks out over the River Suir and the Comeragh and Knockmealdown Mountains; the menu includes Irish and French specialties and seasonal dishes such as salmon, trout, lobster and game. Open daily from 12:30-2:30 and for dinner, Monday-Saturday, 7 to 9:30, Sunday until 8:30. ☎ (052) 38222; fax 38300.

The **Derg Room Restaurant**, in The Lakeside Hotel, Ballina, a very pleasant choice for a meal, has an interesting menu and is open from noon-2 pm for lunch and from 7-9 pm for dinner. ☎ (061) 376-122.

The Tower, on Church Street in the center of Roscrea, is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner, every day, from 7.30am to 9pm. ☎ (0505) 21774.

The Park Inn, New Street, Carrick-on-Suir, serves seafood, steak, vegetarian and Greek dishes. Open Monday to Saturday from 10. 30am-10pm, and on Sundays from 12.30-2.30 and 4.30-10pm. ☎ (051) 640-156.

The South

Cork is the largest county in Ireland, covering roughly 3,000 square miles (7,800 square km), and within its borders there is a great variety of landscape, from the inlets and beaches of its western coast to the wooded valleys of the River Blackwater in the northeast.

Kerry, which borders Cork, also has a beautiful coastline. Its scenery is more rugged, especially in the south, around the **Dingle Peninsula** and the **Ring of Kerry**. The county is home to Ireland's highest mountain, **Carrauntoohill** (1,040 feet/317 m). North Kerry is more low-lying, and has its own beauty.

IN THIS CHAPTER

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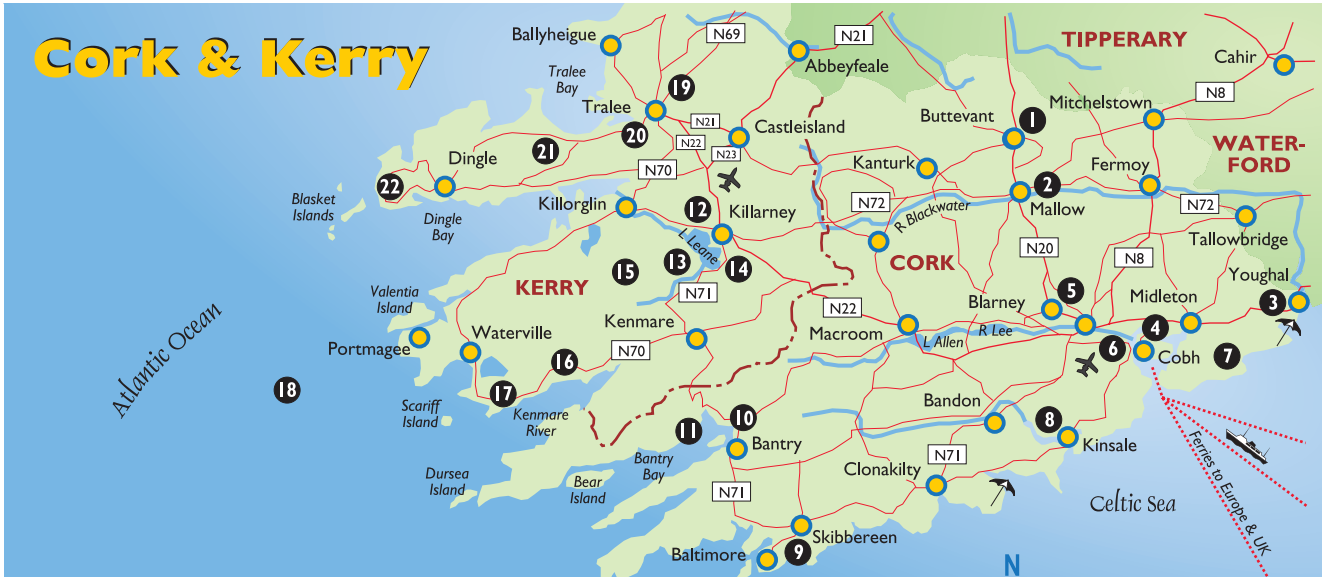
Dingle Peninsula, Co. Kerry

Cork and Kerry are marketed together by *Fáilte Ireland*, through Cork-Kerry Tourism, and have similar characteristics – both have long and indented coastlines and are full of historic sites, from ruined castles and abbeys to much earlier signs of human settlement. More than 80 prehistoric stone circles dot the landscape; their original use is unclear, but they were probably used in rituals. Many Ogham stones are also found in this part of the country. Ogham was an early form of writing, dating from about 300 AD, which uses lines and strokes cut into stone. It's worth getting an Ordnance Survey map if travelling around, so you can find these reminders of history, as only some are signposted.

Cork & Kerry



1. Ballybeg Abbey, Columbarium
2. Mallow Castle, Clocktower, Market House, Courthouse
3. Myrtle Grove, Almshouses, Red House, St. Mary's Collegiate Church
4. Fota Estate, Arboretum, Wildlife Park; Queenstown Story
5. Blarney Castle
6. Royal Cork Yacht Club
7. William Penn Family Home
8. French Prison, Charles Fort
9. Heritage Centre
10. Bantry House, Ballylickey
11. Garnish Island, Glengariff
12. Museum of Irish Transport; Killarney Model Railway; St. Mary's Cathedral
13. Muckross Abbey; Ross Castle
14. Museum of Kerry Life; Muckross Traditional Farms; Muckross Friary
15. McGillicuddy Reeks; Gap of Dunloe; Carrauntoohill
16. Iveragh Peninsula, Ring of Kerry
17. Derrynane House
18. The Skelligs
19. Kerry County Museum; Siamsa Tire Theatre
20. Blennerville Windmill
21. Conor Pass
22. Blasket Centre

With their coastline of roughly 1,100 miles (1,800 km), counties Cork and Kerry are a paradise for anyone interested in spending time near the sea, whether it's to swim, to enjoy other watersports, to fish, or just to enjoy time in the fresh air. This part of Ireland is ideal for activities such as hill walking, golf, horse riding, deep-sea angling, game and coarse angling, cycling, and watersports. It has attracted and inspired writers and artists from all over the world, and many have made their home here, especially along or near the coast.

Part of West Cork and the island of Cape Clear are a *Gaeltacht* (Irish speaking area), and so are the western parts of County Kerry. You'll find lots of places all over both counties where you can hear Irish music and enjoy watching people dance and sing, even joining in yourself.

The region has one city, Cork, and many interesting and lively towns and villages; the largest towns in Kerry are Killarney in the south and Tralee in North Kerry.

Many areas are quiet and remote, particularly the peninsulas, including Beara in Cork and Dingle in Kerry, which jut out into the Atlantic.

◆ Getting Here

You can fly directly from the US to **Shannon** or **Dublin**, then travel to Cork and Kerry by car, train or bus.

You can also fly to **Cork Airport**, which has scheduled service from the UK, Europe and from Dublin and Belfast.

Kerry Airport is at Farranfore, and is much smaller, with a limited number of flights from the UK.

◆ Getting Around

Although there is reasonably good bus service throughout counties Cork and Kerry, and rail service between some of the main towns in the region, the best way to explore is by renting a car or bike, as there are so many delightful places away from major roads.

By Road

Cork City is served by major routes N8-N7-M7-N7 from Dublin (159 miles/256 km), and N20-N21-N18 from Galway (187 miles/301 km).

The N25 links Waterford and Cork, and the N20 links Limerick and Cork.

Within the region, the main routes include the N71, which runs west of Cork City through the costal towns of Bandon, Clonakilty and Skibbereen, then north to Bantry, Glengarifff, Kenmare and Killarney.

The N72 runs from the N8 (main Dublin-to-Cork route) at Fermoy westwards to Mallow and then on through Rathmore to Killarney.

East of Cork City, the N25 bypasses the town of Midleton, passes through Youghal and continues east into County Waterford.

Killarney is connected to Tralee by the N22, which passes Kerry Airport at Farranfore. The N21 connects Tralee and Castlegregory with Abbeyfeale and Adare in neighboring Co. Limerick. Alternatively, from Tralee you can take the N69 to Listowel and on to Tarbert, where a ferry transports vehicles and pedestrians across the River Shannon to Co. Clare.

By Rail

In Co. Cork, there are stations in Cork City, Cobh, Mallow, Charleville, Banteer and Millstreet.

In Co. Kerry, there are stations at Rathmore, Killarney, Farranfore and Tralee.

County Cork

◆ Tourist Information

At **Cork Airport**, tourist information is available in the terminal. **Cork-Kerry Tourism** has information offices open all year at:

Grand Parade, Cork City, ☎ (021) 425-5100; info@corkkerrytourism.ie; www.corkkerry.ie.

Town Hall, Skibbereen (year-round), ☎ (028) 21766.

Blarney, in co-operation with Blarney Tourism, ☎ (021) 4381-624.

There are also offices open in the main tourist season at:

- **Bantry**, ☎ (027) 50229
- **Clonakilty** (year-round), ☎ (023) 33226
- **Glengarifff**, ☎ (027) 63084
- **Kinsale** (year-round), ☎ (021) 477-2234

- **Macroom**, ☎ (026) 43280
- **Midleton**, ☎ (021) 461-3702

If you're visiting at a quiet time of the year, ask in local shops for information as they often have brochures and maps.**Fáilte Ireland** has a Web site covering both counties: www.corkkerry.ie.

West Cork Tourism does wonderful work, including producing free guides to everything the area offers, all under the "Fuchsia" brand, the shrub found all over this part of the country. If you're heading for this area, get their booklet called *Our Home, Your Holiday*, which is invaluable. UDC (Urban District Council) Offices, North Street, Skibbereen, ☎ (028) 22812; wctc@indigo.ie; www.westcorktourism.ie. Another very useful Web site, listing hotels, guesthouses, activities, is www.cometocork.com. And everything from sport and entertainment to accommodation is on: www.dodingle.com; ☎ (066) 915-0898; info@dodingle.com.

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

Cork City Ancestral Project, c/o Cork County Library, Farranlea Road, Cork, ☎ (021) 434-6435; fax 434-3254; corkancestry@ireland.com. The research facility was suspended at time of writing, so check. In North Cork, there is **Mallow Heritage Centre**, 27/28 Bank Place, Mallow, ☎ (022) 50302; fax 20276; mallowhc@eircom.net; www.irishroots.net.

◆ Sightseeing

Cork City

Cork is Ireland's second city and its people (only half-jokingly) refer to it with pride as "the real capital." Founded over 800 years ago as a walled port, some of the medieval town's characteristics have survived in Cork's street patterns, especially in the North and South Main Street area. On North Main Street you'll see brass plates set into the ground marking where the narrow medieval alleys ran.

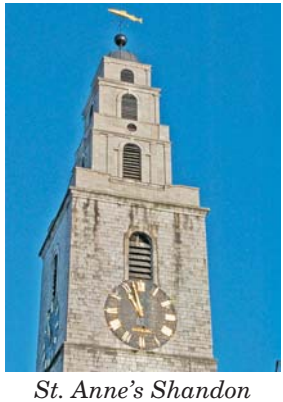
The city originally developed on what was an island where the River Lee branches before entering the harbor. On South Mall, the city's financial area, you can still see where boats were tied up as recently as 200 years ago when the street was part of the river.

Fitzgerald's Park, Cork

Fitzgerald's Park, within walking distance of the city center, is a pleasant place for a rest or stroll. Close to it is **University College**, Cork, founded in 1845 as Queen's College, the queen being Victoria of England. It has outgrown its original campus, which is also a pleasant place to visit, and where guided tours are organized during the summer.

Avoid the city on Sundays, as almost everything, apart from pubs and chain stores, is closed. Anyone interested in learning something of Ireland's history will enjoy a visit to The **Public Museum** in Fitzgerald's Park, on the Mardyke off Western Road. Entrance is free but the opening hours could be improved, as it's closed at lunchtime, all day Saturday and on bank holiday weekends. ☎ (021) 427-0679.

Cork Harbor is one of the largest natural enclosed harbors in the world and brought much prosperity to the city from the mid-18th century on, when it was at the center of overseas trade. Many of the county's roads developed from the routes used by farmers transporting their goods into the city for export. Pay a visit to the **Butter Museum** in Shandon, next to where the Butter Market stood. You'll learn about the importance of that and other commodities in the city's past. Open daily March to October, 10 am to 5 pm, and the rest of the year by arrangement. ☎ (021) 430-0600; fax 430-9966, www.corkbutter.museum.



St. Anne's Shandon

Nearby is the church of **St. Anne's Shandon**, which has become a symbol of the city. It's known affectionately as "the four-faced liar," because its four clock-faces tell different times. For a tiny fee, you can climb the tower of St. Anne's for a fine view of the city and its waterways, and even play a tune on its bells. Try to resist playing Christmas carols in August! Open Monday-Saturday, year-round; May to September, 9 am to 5 pm; October to April, 10 am to 3 pm.

☎ (021) 450-5906; info@shandonsteeple.com; www.shandonbells.org, info@shandonbells.org.

WALKING TOURS

During the summer, there are guided tours of the city; they start from outside the Tourist Office on Grand Parade, where you can ask about them. Walking tours of Kinsale are also available during the summer – ask at the tourist office there.

Historical/literary walking tours of Cork City, evenings, end with pint of locally produced Beamish & Crawford stout in the traditional **An Spailpin Fanac** pub, call for times: ☎ (021) 435-3610.

BUS TOURS

Bus Éireann runs open-topped bus tours of the city and nearby Blarney, twice daily (10:30 am and 2.45 pm) from mid-March to late September. They depart from the bus station. They take about three hours. Pre-booked passengers are also picked up at the city library, opposite the tourist office on Grand Parade. Don't worry – if the weather is bad, they use an ordinary bus.

The company also runs day tours from Cork City during the summer, visiting sites in counties Tipperary, Waterford and Clare, as well as the Ring of Kerry and West Cork, the latter including a cruise to Cape Clear Island. They are a pleasant way of exploring if you don't want to rent a car.

Booking is advised for all bus tours. To book, call the bus station or one of the following:

The Travel Centre, Bus Station, Cork City, ☎ (021) 450-8188

Tourist Office, Cork City, ☎ (021) 427-3251

Tourist Office, Blarney, ☎ (021) 438-1624

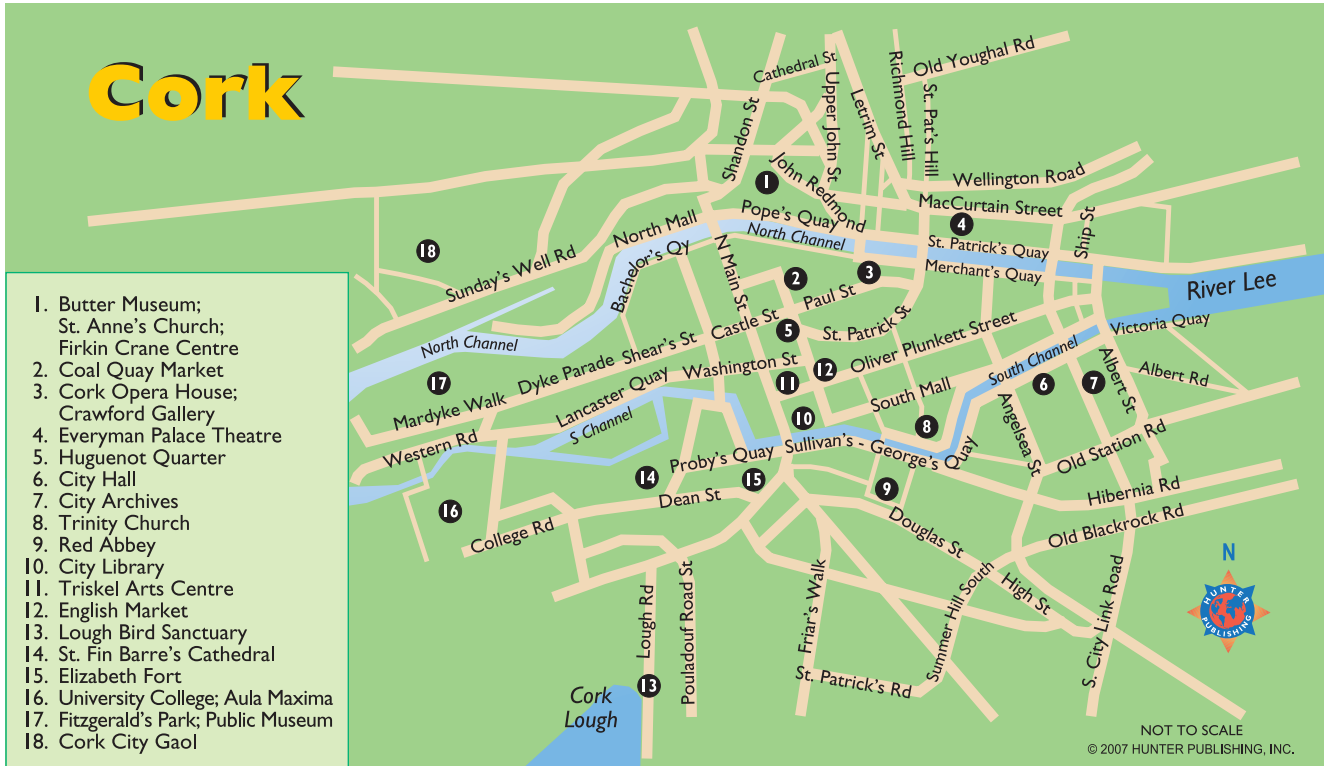
Tourist Office, Kinsale, ☎ (021) 477-2234

O'Driscolls Travel Agency, Macroom, ☎ (026) 41342. info@buseireann.ie; www.buseireann.ie

Easy Tours runs coach tours to Co. Kerry from Cork City (advance booking essential). ☎ (021) 436-2484, www.easytourscork.com.

Road Runners has tours of Kinsale and West Cork by mini-bus, ☎ (021) 477-3423.

Cork


1. Butter Museum; St. Anne's Church; Firkin Crane Centre
2. Coal Quay Market
3. Cork Opera House; Crawford Gallery
4. Everyman Palace Theatre
5. Huguenot Quarter
6. City Hall
7. City Archives
8. Trinity Church
9. Red Abbey
10. City Library
11. Triskel Arts Centre
12. English Market
13. Lough Bird Sanctuary
14. St. Fin Barre's Cathedral
15. Elizabeth Fort
16. University College; Aula Maxima
17. Fitzgerald's Park; Public Museum
18. Cork City Gaol
Cathedral St
Upper John St
Lavitt's Quay
Richmond Hill
St. Pat's Hill
Old Youghal Rd
Shandon St
John Redmond
Wellington Road
MacCurtain Street
Pope's Quay
North Channel
St. Patrick's Quay
Ship St
Merchant's Quay
River Lee
North Mall
Bachelor's Qy
N Main St
Paul St
Castle St
St. Patrick St
Oliver Plunkett Street
Victoria Quay
Albert Rd
Albert St
Sunday's Well Rd
North Channel
Mardyke Walk
Dyke Parade
Shear's St
Lancaster Quay
Washington St
South Channel
South Mall
Angelsea St
Old Station Rd
Western Rd
S Channel
Proby's Quay
Sullivan's Quay
George's Quay
Hibernia Rd
Dean St
College Rd
Douglas St
Old Blackrock Rd
Lough Rd
Pouladouf Road St
Friar's Walk
Summer Hill South
High St
S. City Link Road
St. Patrick's Rd
Cork Lough
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PARKING IN CORK CITY

A disc parking system is followed here. Discs can be bought in garages and shops. There are also a number of well signposted public car parks around the city, some at shopping centers.

◆ Shopping

Walk around Cork's shops and you'll see signs of how the city has developed over the centuries. The **English Market**, entered from Grand Parade or from Princes Street, has its own special charm, and if you are looking for food for a picnic this is where to go. It's open Monday-Saturday, 8 am-6 pm. Particularly tempting are the bread stall and another one selling cheeses made by small producers all over the county. There's a whole section of the market devoted to fish, worth a look for the variety. Upstairs, there is a good restaurant called **Farmgate**, open during market hours; it's a branch of the original, which is in the town of Midleton in East Cork.

The **Huguenot Quarter** around Paul Street, just off Patrick Street, the city's most important thoroughfare, is a good place to browse in interesting little shops and where there are plenty of places to eat. Nearby is the **Crawford Gallery**, with its permanent collection of Irish paintings and occasional visiting exhibitions. It has a great café run by **Ballymaloe Country House Hotel** in East Cork, which is famous for its food and cookery school.

Entertainment

CULTURAL EVENTS

Cork is an artistic city. It is the home of the **National Sculpture Factory**, the **Crawford Gallery**, **Cork Opera House**, the **Everyman Palace Theatre**, **Triskel Arts Centre**, the **Lavit Gallery**, and other galleries and performance spaces, including Tig Fili, the Granary Theatre and the Fenton Gallery. Entrance to exhibitions is free, with admission charges for other events such as lectures and readings. It also has an art-house cinema, the Kino, with a year-round program.

It's affectionately known as Ireland's festival city, with annual celebrations of choral music (Spring), folk music (September), film (mid-October) and jazz (last weekend of October), all of which have been running for decades, and all of them featuring international stars.

More recently, the Cork Midsummer Festival in June has been added to the calendar.

EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE

Cork has been designated European Capital of Culture for 2005, having competed against Galway, Limerick and Waterford to win the prestigious title awarded by the EU.

There will be a full program of events all year, including lots of special sporting events, dramatic performances, exhibitions, recitals, street performances, film screenings, seminars, cultural exchanges, and lots more.

In preparation for the year, improvements have been made to the fabric of the city, including a much-needed revamping of Patrick Street, which will benefit the city long after the celebration has been forgotten.

Details from all tourist offices or ☎ (021) 455-2005; info@Cork2005.ie; www.Cork2005.ie.

NIGHTLIFE

The **Opera House** presents its own shows, as well as histing large-scale visiting by professional Irish companies and by visiting companies from the West End, London, and elsewhere. It has a smaller venue, the **Half Moon**, which doubles as a site for small-scale productions and as a late-night club with live music. ☎ (021) 427-0022.

The **Everyman Palace** is smaller and stages a mixture of professional touring productions by Irish and overseas companies, concerts and local amateur plays – many of them by Irish playwrights John B. Keane and Sean O'Casey. There is a lunchtime series that runs during the summer and occasionally throughout the year. Play readings are also held at times in its **Palace Bar**. ☎ (021) 450-1673.

The **CAT Club** (Cork Arts and Theatre Club) is devoted to amateur companies from the city and county, with an intimate auditorium and a bar (open before and after evening shows), where you can meet the actors and others interested in theater. ☎ (021) 450-8398.

The **Granary Theatre** belongs to UCC, and during the academic year (October to May) most of the productions are by students. It hosts a Fringe Festival (in October) of shows seen at the Dublin and

Edinburgh festivals, as well as a summer season with productions by local companies. ☎ (021) 490-4275.

The **Firkin Crane Centre** in Shandon houses the National Institute for Choreography and Dance; it runs workshops and hosts dance performances. A "firkin" is a small barrel used for making butter, and the Centre is next to the Butter Museum. ☎ (021) 450-7487, www.instchordance.com, info@firkincrane.ie.

Classical music concerts are held in the evenings in **Triskel Arts Centre**, in **Cork City Hall** and in the **Aula Maxima**, UCC, and there's a lunchtime series in the **Crawford Gallery** in the Spring. Summer is not a good time for lovers of classical music, at least not in Cork City.

For authentic Irish music, it's usually best to head for a pub as, apart from headline acts, which appear at the largest venues, that's where you'll hear the best. One of my favorites, **The Lobby**, opposite City Hall, has a varied and interesting program all year round. ☎ (021) 431-1113.

Nightclubs in the city are discos, rather than places for live performance, and are all for the 18-to-30 age group.

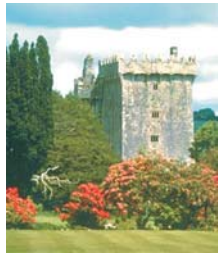
For details of shows and other events, check the local newspapers, *The Irish Examiner* and *The Evening Echo*, pick up a copy of the free *Whazon?* or check their Web site – www.whazon.com.

Spectator Sports

There are lots of **GAA** (Gaelic Athletic Association) matches; ask locally or check newspapers for details. Also, as you travel around minor roads outside the city, you may come across men enjoying a round of road bowling, seen nowhere but here and in Co. Armagh.

Curraheen Park Greyhound Stadium, in the Bishopstown suburb of the city, has 10 races every Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday starting at 7:50 pm. ☎ (021) 454-3095, or in Ireland, 1-850-525-525, reservations@curraheenpark.igb.ie. There's a bar and fine dining there at **The Laurels Restaurant**. ☎ (021) 493-3154.

THE GIFT OF THE GAB



Blarney, six miles (10 km) northwest of Cork City, must be one of the most famous of all towns in Ireland, especially among North Americans, because of the **Blarney Stone**, said to give those who kiss it the "gift of the blarney" or "the gab." That means the ability to be as articulate as most of the Irish.

To kiss the stone you have to climb up to the top of the ruined Blarney Castle and be suspended over a hole – not for the unfit or fainthearted, as climbing the narrow and winding stone stairs is difficult if you are large, and can be slippery, especially when descending.

Your entrance fee includes a certificate stating that you have kissed the Stone. Open June-August, 9 am-7 pm; May and September, to 6:30 pm, October-April, to sundown or 6 pm. Earlier closing on Sundays. ☎ (021) 438-5252, www.blarneycastle.ie.

◆ Exploring West Cork

Kinsale

Kinsale is 16 miles (26 km) west of the city; it's known as "the gourmet capital of Ireland" for the number of great places to dine in the town. The Good Food Circle has been organizing the **Kinsale Food Festival** here every autumn for over 25 years; www.kinsale.ie.

Kinsale is a charming town; its narrow streets are steeped in history and its harbor is always full of boats. Visit the museum housed in the **French Prison** or, just outside the town, the star-shaped **Charles Fort** with its spectacular views, where you will learn about the country's history. Open daily, mid-March to late October. ☎ (021) 477-2263.

As you journey west, you pass through many other pleasant places, including picturesque Innishannon, and the bustling market towns of **Bandon** and **Skibbereen**, as well as smaller **Dunmanway**.

At Skibbereen there's a **Heritage Centre** in the beautifully restored **Old Gasworks** building on the riverside. It houses an exhibition that commemorates the Great Famine. West Cork was one of the areas very badly affected by the mid-19th-century famine. Also, the **Lough Hyne Visitor Centre** gives a fascinating insight into Ireland's first Marine Nature Reserve. The lough (lake) itself is nearby. Open March-October, Tuesday to Saturday, 10 am-6 pm; open daily in summer. ☎ (028) 40900.

Clonakilty

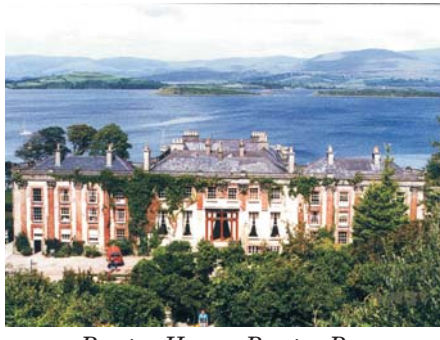
Clonakilty is 32 miles (51 km) west of Cork City. It is one of the prettiest towns in West Cork, with colorful buildings and hand-painted signs over its shops and pubs. It has won numerous awards, including the EU **Entente Florale**. The town calls itself "the gateway to West Cork" and it certainly makes an ideal base for tours of the area. Nearby, there's the wonderful Blue Flag beach (see page 63) of **Inchydoney**, as well as lots of little coves to discover. **Courtmacsherry**, a delightful fishing village, proud of having the oldest lifeboat station in Ireland, is 10 minutes away by car.

Clonakilty

Bantry

Along the coast is Bantry, which is not the most attractive of towns, especially when you enter it from the east, where there's a huge graveyard reminding all who pass of their eventual fate. What makes it worth visiting is its setting on the beautiful Bantry Bay, and the surrounding area, which has much to offer. There are delightful villages and wonderful views wherever you drive, whether along the coast or inland.

Bantry House & Gardens was the first stately home in the Republic to open to the public; it is still occupied by the descendants of the original Earls of Bantry. On the property is the French Armada Centre, which commemorates events of 1796, when the French, inspired



Bantry House, Bantry Bay

by Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen, attempted to put an end to British rule in Ireland.

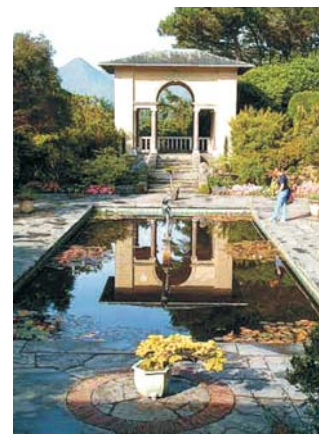
The **Bantry House Tearoom** hosts annual events, including West Cork Chamber Music Festival. House, gardens & French Armada Centre are open daily, March to October, 10am to 6pm. ☎ (027) 50047; www.bantryhouse.com.

Glengariff, farther along the coast, is a pretty little traditional village with a small harbor, and a pleasant place to spend at least a few hours.

Just a couple of miles north along the coast road from Bantry is **Ballylickey**, which has a wonderful emporium selling every kind of foodstuff imaginable, most locally produced.

A Treasure Island

Garnish Island, off Glengariff, is unique – the entire island is a garden. Also known as Garinish and Ilnacullin, its 37 acres were transformed by former owner Anna Bryce and Harold Peto, an architect and garden designer, into a magical place. You can spend hours wandering its little paths that climb through the trees to a Martello Tower. Anna Bryce left the island to the Irish nation in her will when she died in 1953. You usually see seals basking on the rocks as you make the short crossing from



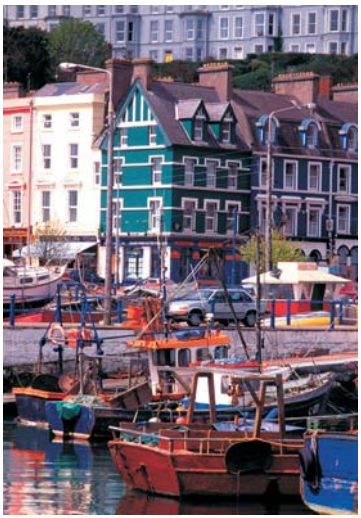
Garnish Island, Glengariff

Glengarifff, and from the island there are wonderful views of the surrounding area. Even if you have no particular interest in gardens, you'll enjoy a visit. There's a café open in the summer. Garnish Island is open daily, March-end October. Access is by privately operated boats, paid separately. Harbour Queen Ferry Services operates from Glengarifff Harbour to the island.

You could easily spend days or weeks exploring West Cork, wandering up and down its lovely quiet roads. Although popular, it is never crowded, and there are always delightful places to discover. Among personal favorites are **Schull**, **Glandore**, and **Mizen Head**.

◆ Exploring East Cork

East of Cork City lies **Cobh** (pronounced cove), which has a Mediterranean atmosphere with sunshine, steep streets and curved Georgian terraces looking out over Cork Harbor. You can get there by road or train.



Cobh Harbour

The train to Cobh stops at the **Fota** estate, the home of an arboretum and the only wildlife park in the country. The **Arboretum** at Fota was started by the Smith-Barry family in the 1820s and has a marvelous collection of trees and shrubs from all over the world. **Fota Wildlife Park** opened in 1983 and here animals, many of them endangered in the wild, wander happily. Only the cheetahs are caged; the others are protected from humans by ditches. There's a coffee shop and gift shop on site. Open daily, year-round, except December 25 and 26; last admission is at 5 pm and gates close at 6 pm. ☎ (021) 481-2678; www.fotawildlife.ie.

Unfortunately, the Fota House itself is more or less empty, and not worth touring. That's a shame, as it won both a national and European award when privately run in the 1980s. Among its contents then

was a wonderful collection of Irish paintings and furniture. You can still see some of those paintings in the Foundation Building at the University of Limerick, but the Irish period furniture is sadly in storage.

Cobh

Cobh was called Queenstown for several years (after Victoria, England's monarch), before reverting in 1922 to its old Irish name. Cobh means the "cove" of Cork and it has a special place in the hearts of many North Americans as one of the places from which their ancestors left to find new lives across the Atlantic.

If you only visit one heritage site during your vacation, make it the **Queenstown Story**, housed in the old railway station. This is a wonderful exhibition telling the story of those emigrants. Only the truly hard-hearted could fail to be moved, particularly when you see what it was like to travel on one of those coffin ships. Open daily, year-round, March-November, 9:30 am to 6 pm, last admission 5 pm; rest of year, closes at 5 pm, with last admission at 4 pm. ☎ (021) 481-3595.

There is a genealogical service available through the Queenstown Story; ☎ (021) 481-3591, fax 481-3595; www.cobhheritage.com, info@cobhheritage.com. On the quayside is a **statue of Annie Moore** and her little brothers. She was the first Irish person to land at Ellis Island, and the twin of the Cobh statue can be seen in the Arrivals Hall at the Ellis Island Center in New York Harbor.

Titanic Trail, a guided walking tour of Cobh, is offered daily, year-round; there's also a ghost walk, pub crawl, and mini-bus tours; Michael Martin ☎ (021) 481-5211; info@titanic-trail.com www.titanic-trail.com.

Here, in April 1912, the Titanic *picked up the last 123 passengers on her maiden voyage to America.*

Midleton

Midleton is a pleasant market town, just off the main road (N25) to Waterford, with interesting shops and plenty of pubs and restaurants, including the original Farmgate (the other is in the city) and a **Craft Gallery** with lots of items that make great souvenirs or gifts.

It's also the home of the **Old Midleton Distillery**, where you can enjoy a tour and a taste of the whiskey. There's a craft shop, restaurant

and tourist information point on site. Open year-round, 10 am to 6 pm, with last tour at 4:30 pm. ☎ (021) 461-3594.

Nearby villages include **Ballycotton**, with its fishing harbor, and **Garryvoe**, with its long flat beach, ideal for a walk. The ruins of the ancestral home of William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania, can be seen in **Shanagarry**, where Stephen Pearce's pottery is worth a visit.

You also pass through some quite attractive little villages if you stay on the N25 (Waterford road), including **Castlemartyr** and **Killeagh**. Away from the main route there is lovely countryside to enjoy, as well as quiet little beaches.

Youghal

The Quays, Youghal

When you enter Youghal from the direction of Cork, the first thing you see is a large pink building, which unfortunately now dominates the skyline. Try to ignore this new development (it houses vacation apartments and a bar), as Youghal is an interesting town in an attractive setting, with a long beach – a delight to stroll along when the tide is out.

There is a clock tower you drive under and there are traces of the town's historic walls. It is worth staying here at least for a few hours.

Myrtle Grove, the home of Sir Walter Raleigh, is an interesting building, but it is not open to the public. Visitors are welcome at the **Almshouses**, the **Red House**, and don't miss **St. Mary's Collegiate Church**, one of the oldest churches on these islands still in use. The town was used as the location for the film *Moby Dick*, starring Gregory Peck, and there's a pub by that name.

On the other side of Youghal, heading into Waterford, you can turn left away from the sea and you're on the **Blackwater Valley Drive** (see under Co. Waterford, page 230).

◆ Exploring North Cork

River Blackwater at Fermoy

North Cork is dominated by the valley of the **River Blackwater**, and has two of the busiest main roads in the Republic running through it – the N20 to Limerick and the N8 toward Dublin. It's well worth looking at www.blackwaterholidays.com.

The River Blackwater is one of the longest rivers in the Republic at 74 miles (120 km). It rises in Co. Kerry, flows east from North Cork to Cappoquin in neighboring Co. Waterford and then turns south to enter the sea near Youghal.

Mallow

Mallow is 20 miles (32 km) north of Cork City and just off the N20. It grew up around the Blackwater and the ruins of the original 16th-century castle can be seen in the grounds of the present **Mallow Castle**, now privately owned. It was a spa town in the 18th and early 19th centuries, when many people came to take the waters. Interesting buildings here include the neo-Tudor **Clock House**, dating from the early 19th century, and the **Market House** and **Courthouse**, both built of limestone. Northeast of Mallow is **Doneraile** and its Forest Park.

Buttevant

Buttevant, on the N20, got its name from *boutez en avant*, the battle-cry of the Barry family who owned much of Co. Cork, including the Fota estate near Cobh. The ruins of the abbey they founded are next to the modern Catholic church in the middle of the town's main street. It was from here that the first steeplechase was run in 1720, literally between the steeples of churches in Buttevant and Doneraile. On the N20, on the Cork side of the town, are the ruins of **Ballybeg Abbey**, including an almost intact columbarium – a circular building where doves were kept. After Buttevant you come to **Ballyhoura Country** (see box on page 354).

Fermoy

Fermoy is also on the Blackwater, along the N8 (Dublin road), and badly needs a by-pass as it gets choked with traffic. It's a busy market town, with some attractive buildings. Before Ireland's independence, it had one of the largest military barracks on these islands, traces of which can still be seen. It's a popular base for those interested in fishing or exploring the Blackwater Valley.

◆ Adventures

In & On the Water

FISHING & SIGHTSEEING

Cork Harbor offers excellent opportunities for deep-sea anglers, even when weather conditions are not good enough to allow travel past its mouth at **Roches Point**.

Every August, Cobh hosts a **regatta**, which is hugely enjoyable. A great vantage point for watching the colorful sailboats on the water below is up near the Cathedral. The **Cobh International Deep Sea Angling Festival** has been well established for many years, and every September attracts many visiting anglers from all over the country and overseas.

Kinsale Deep Sea Angling has boats available for angling, dolphin and whale watching, sightseeing. ☎ (021) 477-8944; willemvandijk@eircom.net, www.solcon.nl/kinsale.

Charter boats are available from the **Courtmacsherry Sea Angling Centre**, ☎ (023) 46427; csal@iol.ie, www.angling.erin.ie.

Gerald O'Neill Sea Angling runs trips from Union Hall and Glandore for deep sea, reef, wreck and shark fishing from April-Oct. ☎ (028) 33510, kitty2@ireland.com, www.oneillangling.com.

Angling and diving charters are available from **West Cork Marine Tours**, Castletownshend. ☎ (028) 36832; www.whales-dolphins-ireland.com.

TAKE A HARBOR CRUISE

Those who just want to sit back and enjoy being on the water can take a cruise of Cork Harbor from Cobh. Contact **Marine Transport Services** at ☎ (021) 4811485 for details. They also organize special cruises for groups.

THE OLDEST YACHT CLUB

Crosshaven is the home of the **Royal Cork Yacht Club**, the oldest yacht club in the world, founded in 1720. It's an attractive small town on the western side of Cork Harbor, at the head of a long narrow estuary leading to the busy little town of Carrigaline.

The club offers a variety of sailing activities for all ages from young children upwards. It also hosts **Ford Cork Week**, held every two years, regarded as Europe's most competitor-friendly regatta, which attracts contestants from all over the globe. The next one is in 2004. ☎ (021) 483-1023; fax 483-1586; office@royalcork.com; www.royalcork.com.

WATERSPORTS

With its many small bays and harbors County Cork is the ideal destination for anyone interested in watersports. Surfing, windsurfing, canoeing, waterskiing, sailing and diving are all available, with classes at a number of centers, among them the following.

Coolmain Sailing, Bandon, offers everything from Taster Sessions, lasting two-three hours – when you can find out if you're interested in learning – to two- and five-day courses in summer, as well as evening courses year-round. Contact Kim or Jean Wood, ☎/fax (023) 44464; enquiries@coolmain-sailing.com; www.coolmain-sailing.com.

Glenans Irish Sailing Club, Baltimore, West Cork, is based in what was the village's railway station, where hostel accommodation is available in the former Stationmaster's House. Classes offered include dinghy and keelboat sailing. Contact them at The Station House, Baltimore, ☎ (028) 20154; fax 20312; info@glenans-ireland.com; www.glenans-ireland.com.

Sovereign Sailing is based in the Kinsale Yacht Club Marina. It has a number of courses available, all designed with a maximum of four participants. So if you can arrange your own group of four the courses can be arranged to suit you. Courses include An Introduction to Crewing, Spinnaker and Sail Trim, or Day Navigation. You can also take a cruise of any length from a half-day to a maximum of six days or four for overnight cruises. ☎/fax (021) 477-4145; james@sovereignsailing.com; www.sovereignsailing.com.

The **West Cork Sailing Centre** is based at Adrigole on the beautiful Beara Peninsula. It offers dinghy sailing vacations for anyone aged from eight to 80. You can choose from half-day, two-day or five-day sessions. Kayak rental is also available for those who want to take advantage of the sheltered harbor with its seal colony. Classes in powerboats are also offered at the center. There's a lovely Bistro, with a magnificent view of Bantry Bay and the Caha Mountains. Accommodation is available in a nearby hostel, guest houses or in rental cottages or houses. ☎ (27) 60132; fax 60247; info@westcorksailing.com; www.westcorksailing.com.

Other facilities include:

- **Baltimore Sailing School**, ☎ (028) 20141
- **Bluewater Training**, Inniscarra ☎ (021) 4733-2005
- **International Sailing and Powerboating**, Cobh, ☎ (021) 481-1237, www.sailcork.com
- **Kinsale Outdoor Education Center**, ☎ (021) 477-2896, www.kinsaleoutdoors.com
- **Oysterhaven Windsurfing & Sailing Center**, near Kinsale, ☎ (021) 477-0738, www.oysterhaven.com

DIVING

The coastline is known for its outstanding diving conditions, as underwater visibility can be very good when the weather allows. Conditions for surfing and windsurfing are often excellent, and you also have a wide variety of canoeing venues to choose from. Ireland's official national site for disabled waterskiers is on the River Lee near Macroom.

The Baltimore Diving & Watersports Centre runs diving courses for all from the beginner to the experienced, has a restaurant and shop and also offers boat charter. ☎/fax (028) 20300; www.baltimorediving.com.

KAYAKING

Atlantic Sea Kayaking, Skibbereen, offers a variety of courses in kayaking on rivers, lakes and in the sea, including a trip to the Lakes of Killarney. ☎ (028) 21058; atlanticseakayaking@eircom.net; www.atlanticseakayaking.com.

H2O Sea Kayaking, based at Ballinspittle near Kinsale, offers a choice of trips and courses, aimed at everyone from the beginner to

the experienced. Its owners also run **H2O Extreme**, the only dedicated whitewater company in Ireland. ☎ (021) 477-8884; whitewater@dol.ie; www.h2oseakayaking.net.

Sea Kayaking West Cork is based at Castletownbere on the beautiful and quiet Beara Penisula on the north shore of Bantry Bay. They have "come and try it" two-hour sessions, as well as a choice of courses, plus half-day and full-day trips. ☎ (027) 70692; info@seakayakingwestcork.com; www.seakayakingwestcork.com.

BEACHES

There are numerous beaches, some not even signposted, so get a map, or ask locally, and inquire at Tourist Information Offices for details of Blue Flag Beaches (see page 63). Among the most popular and safest strands in Co. Cork are **Garryvoe** and **Youghal** in East Cork, and **Inchydoney** in West Cork.

WEST CORK ISLAND FERRIES

In West Cork there are regular ferries to some of the little islands off the coast – including **Sherkin** and **Cape Clear** – from Baltimore. ☎ (028) 20218.

West Cork Coastal Cruises runs trips to various islands, also from Baltimore. ☎ (028)39153.

Murphy's Ferry Service, from Pontoon, Berehaven, in Bantry Bay, runs frequent trips to Bere Island. ☎ (027) 75014; info@murphysferry.com; www.murphysferry.com.

There's also a daily ferry to **Cape Clear** and a twice-weekly ferry to the **Fastnet Rock**, from Schull. ☎ (028) 28278.

CABLE CAR

You cross to **Little Dursey Island** off the Beara Peninsula by a cable car – the only one in Europe that transports people over the sea.

On Horseback

The Hitchmough Riding School, Monkstown, is five miles from Cork City. It has both indoor and outdoor arenas and a cross-country course. It offers daily programs suitable for all abilities. Open Monday to Saturday from 9

am to 8 pm, or by appointment. ☎ (021) 437-1267; fax 437-4842; hrsi@estatclear.ie.

The Rosscarbery Riding School in West Cork specializes in trekking through forests and on beaches, and it has a special scenic track for beginners. ☎ (023) 48232.

Follyfoot Riding Farm, Riverstick, Kinsale, ☎ (021) 477-1324

Innishannon Horse Centre, ☎ (021) 477-5515

Bantry Horseriding, ☎ (027) 51412

Ballincollig Equestrian Center, near Cork City, ☎ (021) 487-3654

Dunsfort Riding Centre, Baneshane, Midleton, ☎ (021) 463-1851

Hop Island Equestrian Centre, Rochestown, close to Cork City, ☎ (021) 436-127

Mallow Equestrian Centre, Newberry, Mallow, ☎ (022) 42245

THE DONKEY SANCTUARY

This facility at Liscarroll, reached by turning off the N20 Cork-Limerick road at Buttevant, is a very special place. Donkeys rescued from dreadful circumstances are brought here to await new homes. It's a registered charity and visitors are asked for donations. ☎ (022) 48398; www.thedonkeysanctuary.ie.

HORSERACING

Cork Racecourse is 20 miles north of the city, just a mile outside Mallow on the N72 road to Killarney. Races are held throughout the year. ☎ (022) 50207; fax 50213; info@corkracecourse.ie; www.corkracecourse.ie.

◆ Golf

Unfortunately, a number of golf courses in both Cork and Kerry have been built on scenic sites to which the public previously had access. It's a shame to see some of our land become a private playground, despite objections and protests by the public.

The Ted McCarthy Municipal Golf Course is in the suburb of Mahon, and is a parkland course with undulating fairways and many water hazards. It's open daily until dusk. ☎ (021) 429-2543.

Not far away is the **Douglas Golf Club**, ☎ (021) 436-2055; fax 489-5297;admin@douglasgolfclub.ie; www.douglasgolfclub.ie.

Muskerry Golf Club, west of the city at Carrigrohane, has one of the most mature courses in the region, as the club was founded at the beginning of the last century. ☎ (021) 438-5297; fax 451-6860; muskgc@eircom.net.

Blarney Golf Course is six miles from the city and overlooks Blarney Castle. The course is designed in two loops of nine holes. Clubs are available for hire. ☎ (021) 438-2455; fax 438-2416; blarneygolf@esatbiz.com;www.blarneygolfcourse.com.

There are two courses at **Little Island**, seven miles east of Cork City, just off the N25 road to Rosslare and Waterford:

- **Cork Golf Club**, ☎ (021) 435-3451; fax 435-3410
- **Harbour Point Golf Club**, ☎ (021) 435-3094; fax 435-4408; hpoint@iol.ie; www.harbourpointgolf-club.com

Also in East Cork is **Water Rock Golf Club**, close to Midleton. Clubs are available for hire, and there's a pro shop and practice green. The course has lovely views of the countryside. ☎ (021) 461-3499; fax 463-3150; waterrock@eircom.net; www.waterrockgolfcourse.com.

Youghal Golf Club is at Knockaverry, ☎ (024) 92787; fax 92641; youghalgolfclub@eircom.net; www. youghalgolfclub.net.

In North Cork, the **Ballinamona Golf Course** only opened in 2000, and is aimed at the visiting golfer. It's just off the main Cork / Mallow road at Mourne Abbey, and is in an area of undulating landscape. ☎ (022) 29314; www.ballinamona.com.

Charleville Golf Club is in the foothills of the Ballyhoura Mountains, and has both an 18-hole and a nine-hole course. ☎ (063) 81257; fax 81274; charlevillegolf@eircom.net; www.charlevillegolf. com.

Heading west of the city, **Macroom Golf Club** has a lovely setting in the grounds of Macroom Castle on the banks of the River Sullane. ☎ (026) 41072; fax 41391; mcroomgc@iol.ie.

In West Cork there are courses at:

- **Bandon**, ☎ (023) 41111
- **Bantry Bay**, ☎ (027) 50579
- **Berehaven**, ☎ (027) 70700
- **Dunmore**, Clonakilty, ☎ (023) 34644

- **Glengarifff**, ☎ (027) 63150
- **Kinsale**, ☎ (021) 477-4722
- **Lisselan Estate**, Clonakilty, ☎ (023) 33249
- **Skibbereen**, ☎ (028) 21227
- There's also a **Golf Academy** at Ballydehob, ☎ (028) 37700

◆ Where to Stay

For accommodations pricing guide, see page 261.

Cork City

☆☆☆ **Jurys Inn**, on Andersons Quay, overlooking River Lee. Very central, has restaurant and bar, excellent value, room rate about $100 – sleeps three adults. ☎ (021) 494-3000; www.jurysdoyle.com.

Hotel Isaacs, 48 MacCurtain Street, also very central. Offers standard & superior rooms, plus apartments. Its Greenes Restaurant serves interesting food at reasonable prices, has courtyard garden with waterfall. B&B, per person, from $$. ☎ (021) 450-0011; cork@isaacs.ie, www.isaacs.ie.

County Cork

Assolas Country House dates back to the 17th century and is in a beautiful and peaceful setting, near Mallow in North Cork, with swans gliding on the lake in its grounds. It's owned by the Bourke family, and all guests are well looked after. It belongs to the Hidden Ireland group and is therefore not classified under the hotel star system. Its dining room is admired for the imaginative use of the garden produce and of ingredients locally sourced. Rates from $$ to $$$. Assolas is also at times available for private rental. It sleeps 12-18 in its nine bedrooms. ☎ (029) 500-015; assolas@eircom.net.

Ballyvolane House near Castleyons in East Cork is a member of the Great Fishing Houses of Ireland co-operative marketing group. Surrounded by its own farmland, the house was built in 1728 and now provides excellent accommodation for visitors. Merrie and Jeremy Green make all their guests very welcome, and they are given access to private salmon and trout fishing on the River Blackwater. ☎ (025) 36349; www.ballyvolanehouse.ie.

☆☆☆☆ **The Bayview Hotel** in the fishing village of Ballycotton is the only four-star hotel in East Cork, and a wonderful place to stay. The hotel has gardens perched on the cliff or when the weather is bad you can enjoy the view from its windows. The **Capricho restaurant** serves such delights as venison accompanied by baby pear and port wine jus. Rates from $$. ☎ (021) 464-6746.

☆☆☆ **Blarney Park Hotel**, close to the famous Castle, has lovely grounds. It's comfortable and welcoming, has a Leisure Centre with pool, tennis courts, restaurant and bar, and comfortable residents' lounge. Only few minutes by car to Cork City. Excellent value, from $$. ☎ (021) 438-5281; info@blarneypark.com, www.blarneypark.com.

☆☆☆ **Blue Haven Hotel** is in the center of Kinsale and is well known for its excellent food. It's kept its old world charm while offering luxuries. Restaurant, Bar and Café Blue, serving delicious food all day. Rate from $$. ☎ (021) 477-2209; info@bluehavenkinsale.com, www.bluehavenkinsale.com.

Eccles Hotel, Glengarifff, has a wonderful setting, looking out on the bay and Garnish Island, with a wooded hillside behind it. It's been there since 1745 and literary figures including Yeats and Dickens have enjoyed it as much as I did. Ask for a room at the front; there's nothing like waking up to that view. Rates from $$, special offers available. They also have a few rental apartments. ☎ (027) 63003; info@eccleshotel.com; www.eccleshotel.com.

Ballymaloe House Hotel, Shanagarry, Midleton, has been run by the Allen family since the 1960s, when they opened their Yeats Room Restaurant – so named because of the Jack Yeats paintings on its walls. This is now the most famous country house hotel in Ireland, and was very influential in developing Ireland's reputation for excellent food.

Staying or dining here, you are surrounded by a working farm. In Spring, as you drive into the grounds, you pass lambs in the fields. Its famous cuisine uses home-grown and locally produced ingredients. It's open daily to non-residents for lunch at 1 pm; dinner is served from 7 to 9;30 pm. Sunday lunches here are buffet-style, so you can try dishes and keep going back for more of those you like. You have to book ahead because it's so popular. Overnight rate from $$$ in low season. ☎ (021) 465-2531.

Just down the road is the **Ballymaloe Cookery School** at Shanagarry, which is run by Darina Allen, a TV chef and author of cookbooks. From April to September you can visit the gardens and shop here. Cooking demonstrations are held during the afternoons. ☎ (021) 464-6785, info@cookingisfun.ie; www.cookingisfun.ie.

A Rental With a Difference

Ballinacurra House

You can have exclusive use of your own five-star style hotel at **Ballinacurra House**, just two minutes drive outside Kinsale. Ballinacurra was built in 1791 and has been lovingly restored. It's set in its own 25 acres of grounds, and among its attractions are its large patio, croquet lawn, playground, helipad, picnic lawn, pond, small boat jetty, forest pagoda, and its woodland walks. There is a massage room and sauna. Cruises of Kinsale Harbor can be arranged as well as deep sea fishing excursions or explorations of the coastline. It has 13 bedrooms, can sleep up to 30. A resident chef is even available at an extra charge.

Daily rate for the house is €4,000, which works out to just over €300 per night per person, or €150 sharing a double room. ☎ (021) 477-9040; fax 477-9071; info@ballinacurra.com; www.ballinacurra.com.

Guesthouses

There's lots of choice in Cork, both City and County; check Web sites including www.corkkerry.ie. I personally recommend:

You can stay or just dine at the welcoming **Barnabrow House** just outside the gates of Ballymaloe, near Midleton, where meals served in its **Trinity Room restaurant** use locally caught and grown ingredients. The restaurant is also open to non-residents; res-

ervations advised. $$, accommodations in main house or coach house. ☎ (021) 465-2534.

In Cobh, I recommend **Elmville**, Lower Road, Rushbrooke, where Olive O'Brien makes guests feel really welcome in her restored Victorian home. It overlooks the harbor, and has lovely gardens. It's only a five-minute walk to the Queenstown Story, the Railway Station, and Cobh itself. Rates $ sharing, including full Irish breakfast. ☎ (021) 481-3206; www.dragnet-systems.ie/dira/elmville.

Carmel Kelly O'Gorman will welcome you to her beautifully furnished home, **The Lighthouse**, in Kinsale, with four-poster and canopy beds. Mouth-watering breakfast menu. $$. ☎ (021) 477-2734; info@lighthouse-kinsale.com.

Camping & RVing

☆☆☆☆ **Barleycove Holiday Park**, Crookhaven, is near Skibbereen in West Cork. It's in a beautiful setting and facilities include tennis courts, pitch and putt and bikes for rent. Mobile homes available for rent. Open Easter and from mid-April to mid-September. ☎ (028) 35302 when open; (0210 434-6466 rest of year; fax (021) 430-7230.

☆☆☆ **Blackwater Valley Park** is at Fermoy on the N72 Rosslare-to-Killarney road and a few yards from the N8 Cork-Dublin road. It's on the bank of the river it's named after, where guests can fish. Open mid-March to end October. ☎ (025) 32147.

☆☆ **Desert House Caravan and Camping Park** is just outside Clonakilty in West Cork. It's a small park on a working dairy farm, where guests can watch activities, and it overlooks Clonakilty Bay. Open Easter and from May 1 to September 30. ☎ (023) 33331; fax 33048.

☆☆☆☆ **Blarney Caravan and Camping Park** is set in sheltered countryside overlooking Blarney Castle. Its facilities include free showers, pitch and putt course, and a large cooking and dining area. Open March 1 to end October. ☎ (021) 451-6519; fax 438-5167; con.quill@camping-ireland.ie; www.blarneycaravanpark/com.

☆☆☆ **Dowlings Caravan and Camping Park** is situated between the mountains and the sea at Glengarifff in West Cork. Guests are welcome to take part in traditional Irish music and dancing in the bar. There's a shop and takeout food store on site which are open during

the summer. Park open from Easter to end October. ☎/fax (027) 63154.

☆☆☆☆ **Eagle Point Camping** is in a lovely setting on a peninsula at Ballylickey, just outside Bantry in West Cork. It has excellent facilities and is ideal for touring the area, taking part in watersports or fishing, or just relaxing in scenic surroundings close to restaurants and pubs. Open April 25-end September. ☎ (027) 50630; eagepointcamping@eircom.net; www.eaglepointcamping.com.

☆☆☆☆ **Garrettstown House Holiday Park** is in the grounds of an 18th-century estate, six miles from Kinsale, and is open from May to mid-September. ☎/fax (021) 477-8156, www.garrettstownhouse.com.

☆☆ **Sextons Caravan and Camping Park** is at Timoleague, with breakfast available on site. Open mid-March to mid-September. ☎ (023) 46347.

☆☆ **Hungry Hill Camping Site** is at Adrigole Harbor on the Beara Peninsula. It's open mid-March to the end of October; there is also a 23-bed lodge on the property. ☎ (027) 60228; www.hungryhilllodge.com.

☆☆ **O'Riordan's Caravan Park** is at Owenahincha near Rosscarbery, and just six miles from Clonakilty. Mobile homes are available for rent on site. Open all year. ☎ (023) 48216.

☆☆ **Meadow Camping Park** is in a garden setting on the R597 at Glandore. Open mid-March to end September. ☎ (028) 33280; the_meadows@oceanfree.net.

☆☆☆ **Sonas** is at Ballymacoda in unspoiled countryside and its facilities include a shop, laundry, tennis court. Open May to mid-September. ☎ (024) 98960.

☆ **Dunbeacon** is three miles from Bantry overlooking Dunmanus Bay. Open Easter to late October. ☎ (027) 62851; camping@fishpublishing.com.

☆☆☆☆ **The Hideaway** near Skibbereen is a camping and RV park, with excellent facilities. It's only a 10-minute walk into the town. Open end of April to late September. ☎ (028) 22254; the_hideaway@oceanfree.net.

☆☆ **Jasmine Villa Caravan and Camping Park** is at Carrigtwohill on the N25 east of Cork City on the way to Waterford. It's open all year. ☎ (021) 488-3234.

◆ Where to Eat

Cork City

You can find all kinds of restaurants in Cork, varying in price and quality. Among personal favorites are the following:

Ruen Thai Restaurant, Patrick Street, is ideal for lunch from noon to 3 pm or dinner from 5 to 11:30 pm. Allow time and relax; you can stay all evening. ☎ (021) 427-6127.

Café Paradiso, Western Road, on way to the University, is considered one of the best vegetarian restaurants in the whole country. It's so popular that it never advertises and is always busy, so book ahead. ☎ (021) 427-7939.

Scoozies, on Winthrop Lane off Winthrop Street, in city center, serves reasonably priced home-made burgers, pizzas, salads, fish and meat dishes, good service, has tables outdoors for smokers. ☎ (021) 427-5077.

East Cork

The **Farmgate Restaurant**, Midleton, is the original branch; the other is in the English Market in Cork City. It's very popular for snacks, lunch and dinner, and you can also stock up on local produce in the shop. You eat surrounded by flowers, paintings and crafts made by locals. One section is outdoors. The menu includes traditional Irish as well as European dishes, and there are daily specials. In the evenings, a pianist performs on the baby grand, and you can make requests. Very good value and a unique ambience. Open Monday-Saturday, 9 am-5 pm, and Thursday-Saturday, 7:30-9:45 pm. ☎ (021) 463-2777.

In Youghal, **Ahernes Seafood Bar and Gourmet Restaurant** has delighted palates for decades. Locally landed seafood shares the menu with meat and vegetarian dishes. ☎ (024) 92424.

West Cork

At **Heron's Cove**, in Goleen, diners can also stay overnight. It specializes in fish, also offering steaks and delicious vegetarian dishes, including Desmond Cheese and Rocket Risotto. ☎ (028) 35225, www.heronscove.com.

Mary Anne's, the pub and restaurant halfway down Castletownsend's steep street, serves delicious snacks and meals, and in winter there's a roaring fire and lots of chat. ☎ (028) 36146.

The Kinsale Chamber produces a great free brochure, *Eating Around*.

County Kerry

◆ Tourist Information

Cork-Kerry Tourism has offices at **Beech Road**, Killarney, open year-rund. ☎ (064) 31633; fax 34506; **Ashe Memorial Hall**, Denny Street, Tralee. ☎ (066) 712-1288; fax 60360; touristofficetralee@shannon-dev.ie; www.shannon-dev.ie; **Dingle**, open year-round, ☎ (066) 915-1188; **Kenmare**, ☎ (064) 41233; **Waterville**, ☎ (066) 74646; **Cahirciveen**, ☎ (066) 947-2589; and **Listowel**, ☎ (068) 22590.

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

Kerry Genealogical Research Centre, www.irishgenealogy.ie.

◆ Sightseeing

Killarney

Killarney is Kerry's largest town. Since its foundation in 1750 by Lord Kenmare, Killarney has attracted thousands of tourists every year and continues to do so. No wonder, as few towns anywhere have such a beautiful setting. Killarney is ringed by the famous lakes and mountains that have inspired generations of songwriters, poets and artists. Major efforts have been made to make the town itself more attractive, with the addition of flower beds and brick paving, and by encouraging owners of businesses to use traditional wooden shopfronts and signs.

Among the sites worth visiting in Killarney is the **Museum of Irish Transport** in Scotts Gardens, ☎ (064) 32638, opposite the Railway Station. It has a spectacular display of veteran, vintage and classic motor cars. There is also a collection of bicycles and motorcycles on

display. The museum includes a 1930s garage with all the tools, spare parts and oil cans. There's even a 1930s calendar and an original wooden counter, with telephone, wireless and a ledger account book of that era. The walls are covered with a collection of original early motoring and cycling periodicals and of license plates from all over the world. Even if you are not particularly interested in cars and their history, it is so charming that you should enjoy a visit.

On Beech Road, next to the Tourist Information Office, is the **Killarney Model Railway**. It's one of the largest in the world, with over 50 trains running on a mile of track. It transports you through the landmarks of Europe, with thousands of tiny people depicting all walks of life. There's also a four-lane Scalextric racetrack where you can try out your racing skills, and a shop specializing in model railway items, die-cast rally and F1 models and radio control. Stay as long as you like.

St. Mary's Cathedral, Killarney

St. Mary's Cathedral in the town is well worth at least a short visit. It was designed by Augustus Pugin and built in the Gothic style; his plan was for a rugged exterior and a smooth light-filled interior. The Cathedral was consecrated in 1855 and extensively renovated in the 1970s (there was some criticism of the renovation).

The Lakes

If you are in the area, you shouldn't miss taking at least a short trip around the lakes. You can drive yourself or take a **jaunting car** (a horse-drawn carriage driven by a jarvey, or coachman). Be careful about the charges for your trip on a jaunting car. Make sure you understand and agree on terms before climbing aboard.

The three lakes and the mountains that surround them are all within the **Killarney National Park**, Ireland's largest. Nearest the town is **Lough Leane** (the Lower Lake), which is studded with tiny islands.

On its eastern shore are the historic **Muckross Abbey** and **Ross Castle**, which can also be visited by road. At the tip of the Muckross Peninsula is the quaint Brickeen Bridge, and Dinis Island is farther on, with its sub-tropical vegetation and views of the "Meeting of the Waters," made famous in song.

Lough Leane

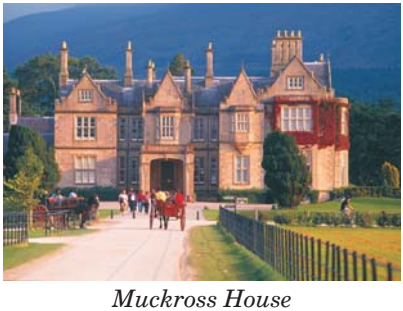
A narrow strait called the **Long Range** leads to the island-studded **Upper Lake**, surrounded by luxuriant woods of oak, arbutus, holly and mountain ash, with an understory of ferns and other plants.

In addition to the three main lakes, there are many others in the folds of the mountains, with numerous picturesque falls; the best known of them is **Torc Waterfall**. The **Owengarriff River** cascades through the wooded Friar's Glen into Muckross Lake. A pretty path takes you up to the top of this 59-foot-high (18 m) waterfall, and as you climb you have fantastic views (unless it is raining).

To the west of the Killarney Valley are the peaks of **MacGillicuddy's Reeks**. These mountains include Carrauntoohill, the highest peak in Ireland. Unless there is a mist or it is raining you should be able to see them.

Muckross

Not far from Killarney is **Muckross House**, with its gardens and traditional farms. The imposing neo-Tudor mansion, built in 1843, is on the shores of Muckross Lake, a beautiful location, and its rooms are full of period furnishings – some too full perhaps.



Muckross House

Most interesting here is the **Museum of Kerry Life**, with displays based on the history of southwest Ireland, and the craft center, where you can watch talented people at work.

The beautifully landscaped lakeside gardens make a great setting for a picnic or stroll. The gardens are a joy, as many tender and exotic trees and shrubs flourish in the mild climate and sheltered location. Particularly attractive features include a fine collection of rhododendrons and azaleas, a garden on a natural rock outcrop, and the tree-fringed lawns.

Ross Castle

Ross Castle is a tower house that was probably built by the O'Donoghue Ross chieftains in the 16th century, with the barracks next to it dating from the mid-18th century. The castle has been fully restored and furnished and it is well worth taking the guided tour. Open daily, April to September; closed Mondays in October; ☎ (064) 35851.

Before leaving Muckross, take the time to visit the 15th- century monastery, or go on a boat trip on the lake or a pony and trap ride along the shore. **Muckross Friary** is in a remarkable state of preservation. The tower was added after the church was built and is the only Franciscan tower in Ireland that is as wide as the church. The cloister and its associated buildings are still complete and there's a very old yew tree standing in the center.

Not far away is **Muckross Traditional Farms,** an outdoor representation of rural life in Kerry in the 1930s. It features three working farms, a laborer's cottage, blacksmith's forge, carpenter's workshop, lime kiln and well, all of which you can visit. The aim of this development is to give you the experience of rural life as it was in the early part of the 20th century. Each season had its own set of activities in the house, the farmyard and on the land. ☎ (064) 31440; fax 31560; muckros@iol.ie; www.muckross-house.ie.

The Gap of Dunloe

The Gap of Dunloe

One of the most famous sites near Killarney is the Gap of Dunloe, on the eastern side of MacGillycuddy's Reeks. It's well worth visiting for the beauty of its rugged scenery, unspoiled landscape and corrie lakes, formed from round hollows in the hillsides. Walking is the best way to see its marvelous views, but you need nearly a day to really explore it properly, as well as sensible footwear and clothing. If you have the time, leave your car at Kate Kearney's Cottage. Alternatively, if you have neither the time nor the energy to walk, you can hire either a pony or a jaunting car to travel the route.

The Ring of Kerry

The Ring of Kerry (110 miles/176 km) circles the **Iveragh Peninsula** through mountain passes, forests, bogs, skirting rivers, lakes and beautiful beaches. The Ring, as its name suggests, is a circular signposted route that passes through Killarney, Killorglin, Glenbeigh, Kells, Caherciveen, Waterville, Caherdaniel, Sneem and Kenmare. To the north of the Iveragh Peninsula is Dingle Bay and to its south is the estuary of the Kenmare River. Off its western edge is **Valentia Island**, which can be reached by road from a bridge at Portmagee and by car ferry from Reenard Point near Caherciveen. The ferry operates all day every day from 8:30 am to 10:30 pm, April 1 to September 30. ☎ (066) 947-6141; fax 947-6377. The harbor at Valentia is Europe's most westerly and it was here that the first transatlantic cable was brought ashore in 1858.

Derrynane

Derrynane House, the ancestral home of Daniel O'Connell, also known as The Liberator, is worth a short detour off the Ring of Kerry near Caherdaniel. It's run by the State Heritage Service and its gardens and the lovely beach nearby are now all part of the **Derrynane**

Historic National Park. You can read about O'Connell's role in the history of Ireland on page 17 in the *Introduction*. Derrynane House, ☎ (066) 947-5113; fax 947-5432; visits@ealga.ie.

The Skelligs

The Skelligs

Eight miles off the coast from Ballinskelligs near Waterville are the Skelligs – a group of small and fascinating islands. Monks landed on ***Skellig Mhichíl*** (pronounced "michael") in the sixth century and built their monastery 600 feet up on a cliff; its ruins stand starkly out from the bare black cliff. They survived there for 600 years by trading with passing ships, before moving to the mainland at Ballinskelligs in the 12th century. **Little Skellig** is home to over 20,000 pairs of breeding gannets, and **Great Skellig** has about 5,000 pairs of puffins, as well as a large number of other birds, including guillemots, stormy petrels and Manx shearwaters.

At the road bridge to Valentia Island at Portmagee, you can visit the **Skellig Experience** and learn all about the islands, their history, and their birds. You can also ask about boat trips to tour them. Open from April to mid-November, ☎ (066) 947-6306; fax rest of year, 481-3591; info@skelligexperience.com; www.skelligexperience.com.

Tralee

Tralee is an interesting and attractive town, the commercial capital and largest town in North Kerry. Its setting is lovely, surrounded by mountains, and looking out over a sheltered bay. At any time of year, you could easily spend a few days here and be kept happily occupied.

Every August the town hosts an international festival, **The Rose of Tralee**, which was inspired by the song of the same title. If you haven't heard of it, take a look at www.roseoftralee.ie.

Tralee is the home of the **Kerry County Museum**, which mounts fascinating temporary exhibitions as well as having a lively and interactive permanent display on local history and culture. There's a lovely Town Park beside it, and nearby is the attractive modern building

1. Kerry County Museum; Geraldine Experience
2. Siamsa Tíre Theatre
3. Steam Railroad Station
4. Kingdom Greyhound Stadium
5. Kerry Literary & Cultural Centre and St. John's Arts Centre, Listowel
6. Library
7. Town Hall

housing the Siamsa Tíre Theatre and company, which is the National Folk Theatre of Ireland.

If you want to see a show that truly reflects the wealth of Irish culture, then go to one at **Siamsa Tíre Theatre**. You don't have to speak or understand Irish to appreciate the magic they create on stage. I don't, and I love what they do. Every time I've watched them, at least half the audience hasn't been able to speak English either! It really does show that sometimes you don't need words to communicate. Music, dance, mime and movement work just as well. One of their productions is about the Blasket Islands, off the Dingle Peninsula, and how the people living there lost their distinct culture when, in 1953, they left to live on the mainland. Siamsa Tíre Theatre, Town Park, Tralee, ☎ (066) 712-3055; info@siamsatire.com; www.siamsatire.com.

Blennerville Windmill

Just two miles outside Tralee is **Blennerville**, which was the main port for emigrants from the county during time of the Great Famine in the 1850s. There's an exhibition about it in the restored **Blennerville Windmill**, built by a local landlord in 1800 and the tallest in Europe. There's a miller on hand to explain the flour-making process, and the complex also includes craft workshops, a gift shop and restaurant. Open daily April-October, 10 am to 6 pm, ☎ (066) 712-1064; fax 712-7444.

Manor West is a recently built shopping center outside of town on the N22 with lots of stores, a restaurant, and 1,000 parking spaces. ☎ (066) 719-0755.

The Kingdom Greyhound Stadium has races every Tuesday and Friday evening all year and also on Saturdays in the summer. The first race is at 7:50 pm, and there's a restaurant and bar. ☎ (066) 712-4033; kingdom_stadium@esatclear.ie; www.igb.ie.

Listowel

About 17 miles north of Tralee on the N69 is Listowel, a charming market town full of traditional shopfronts and interesting pubs, especially the one belonging to the family of the late playwright and author **John B. Keane**.

John B. Keane's Pub

The **Kerry Literary & Cultural Centre** and **St John's Arts Centre** run regular programs of events, including plays, readings and exhibitions. The Cultural Centre has a permanent display, a restaurant and gift and book shop. Open daily April to September, 10 am to 6 pm, and from October to March, Monday to Friday from 10 am to 5 pm. ☎ (068) 22212; fax 22170; info@kerrywritersmuseum.com; www.kerrywritersmuseum.com.

The town is famous throughout Ireland and among those interested in writing for its highly enjoyable annual festival, **Listowel Writers' Week**, which is held in late May/early June. Well known and aspiring writers mix in the town, with readings, book launches, a series of workshops, exhibitions, and lively debates. Contact Listowel Writers' Week at ☎ (068) 21074; fax 22893; www.writersweek.ie.

In September Listowel buzzes with life again when thousands descend on the town to watch the horses at the annual **Listowel Races**.

Nearby is the pleasant seaside resort of **Ballybunion**, just five miles from Listowel, which came to international attention when then-President Bill Clinton played a round of golf on its links course.

The Conor Pass

If you leave Tralee and head west, following the coast of Tralee Bay, you're on your way to one of the most spectacularly beautiful areas on the island. Follow the signs for Conor Pass. You'll have difficulty

keeping your eyes on the road ahead if you're driving, and you'd better not suffer from vertigo!

As you climb, the road winds round and round, and laid out below is a panorama you won't forget. There's a space to stop at the top and get your breath back.

Dingle Marina

You descend on the other side into **Dingle**, the main town on the peninsula. Even if there's hardly a tourist to be seen anywhere else in Ireland, there will be visitors here, most of them from Europe. A major attraction is **Fungie**, who came to live here in 1983. He is a wild bottle-nosed dolphin, and he loves swimming with humans. He got the name from a fisherman, who was trying to grow a beard – and it looked like fungus.

Dingle has brightly painted buildings clustered round its natural harbor, where fishing is carried out as it has been for centuries. No wonder the town is renowned for excellent seafood. It's also the home of **An Café Litearthа**, a great bookshop with café, and lots of interesting craft shops.

Slea Head

Blasket Islands

Carry on through Dingle, following signs this time for Slea Head. The road winds along, and is very narrow in places, but here at least you are not climbing as well. Eventually, you come to **Dunquin** and the **Blasket Centre**, which faces the Blasket Islands. It is one of the most interesting centers I've ever visited, and its location is wonderful. It traces the history and culture of the people who lived on the islands just off the coast from here, until they were abandoned in

the 1950s. ☎ (066) 9156444. If the weather is clear, you can sit outside and see boats taking visitors out to the Blasket Islands.

Tours

Dero's Tours, based in Killarney, have been running escorted day-tours by coach for decades, and operate daily year-round. They offer a choice of routes: Killarney Highlights, Dingle and Slea Head, the Ring of Kerry, the Gap of Dunloe (which includes a homeward journey by boat). They also arrange jaunting car tours, lake cruises, a 24-hour taxi service, and car rental. ☎ (064) 31251; deroscoachtours@eircom.net; www.derostours.com.

Beara Peninsula

O'Connor Auto Tours, also based in Killarney, runs a choice of three day tours – the Ring of Kerry, Dingle's Slea Head, Gap of Dunloe and Lakes of Killarney. Book the day before by calling ☎ (064) 34833.

Power Tours, Rock Street, Tralee, run day tours of the county, and will pick you up at your accommodation by prior arrangement. ☎ (066) 712-9444.

Finnegan's Tours, based in Kenmare, is a family business which has been taking visitors around Kerry and West Cork for generations. Tours include the Beara Peninsula, the Ring of Kerry and Killarney. ☎ (064) 41491.

◆ Adventures

On Foot

LONG-DISTANCE ROUTES

In Cork and Kerry there are a number of long-distance Waymarked Ways: the **Blackwater Way**, part of the **Ballyhoura Way**, the **Sheep's Head Way**, the **Beara Peninsula Way**, the **Kerry Way**, the **Dingle Way**, and the **North Kerry Way**.

Information boards are displayed along the routes, or inquire locally. wear suitable clothing, and get a proper map before setting off.

For details of the waymarked ways all over the country look at www.irishwaymarkedways.ie. This organization produces a free booklet that gives details of all the ways, and includes lists of recommended maps and guides, how to access the ways and route contacts.

PARKS

There are enjoyable walks in forest parks run by *Coillte*, the State Forestry Service in Co. Cork. The **Farran Forest Park** is west of Cork City on the N22 to Macroom.

The **Gougane Barra Forest Park** is west of Ballingeary on the R584 to Bantry, at the Pass of Keimaneigh. The forest park has drive-around facilities with a marked trail; it also has a number of signposted walks.

The park's name, Gougane Barra*, is associated with the patron saint of Cork, Finbar, who, according to tradition, built a monastery on the little island here. Finbar is still a popular first name, though usually shortened to Barry these days.*

The **Millstreet Country Park** is on the Mallow side of Millstreet, on the northern slopes of Musheramore Mountain. In the Visitor Centre there's a multimedia show on the story of the park, and touchscreens to consult for more information if you wish. There are walks, lakes, moorland, managed wetlands, a deer farm, lots of lovely views. Admission rates are per car. Open daily March-October, 10 am to 7 pm. ☎ (029) 70810; micp@iol.ie; www.micp.foundmark.com.

There are enjoyable walks around Glengarifff in West Cork, in the **Caha Mountains National Heritage Area**, and in the **Ancient Oak Forest and National Nature Reserve** on the edge of the village. A popular spot is **Barley Lake** high up on the Caha Mountains, which can almost be reached by road (park and walk the last stretch). It's an armchair or corrie lake, left behind after a glacier.

As well as walking in the **National Park** around Killarney, on the outskirts of the town is the **Coolwood Wildlife Sanctuary**, on a 47-acre complex, seven acres of it a wildlife park and the remaining area a wildlife sanctuary. It's a great place to visit for anyone interested in nature, birds, animals, pets, or just a walk in pleasant surroundings. You'll see lots of red squirrels, there's a well-established rookery, and it is also home to the rare golden eagle.

There are many other walks all over Kerry, including a cliff walk at **Ballybunion**, and the more adventurous **Urlee Hill walk** nearby.

The **Shannon Way** follows the route of the river from Ballybunion to Tarbert on the Shannon Estuary.

The **Kenmare Walking Festival** takes place at the end of May and beginning of June. Call for details at ☎ (064) 41034.

GUIDED WALKING TOURS

South West Walks, Tralee, Co. Kerry, offer escorted and self-guided vacations and short breaks in Cork, Kerry and other parts of Ireland. ☎ (066) 712-8733; www.southwestwalksireland.com.

Hillside Walks, Sheep's Head Peninsula, Glenlough, Bantry, Co. Cork, offer good value six day & weekend packages, March to late October, ☎ (027) 61226; hillsidewalks@eircom.net; www.sheepshead.ie.

On Wheels

How about wandering the roads of County Kerry with reins in your hand and no fixed routes? You can set off from the Dingle Peninsula or Killarney. Contact **Slatterys Horse Drawn Caravans**, Russell Street, Tralee. ☎ (066) 718-6240; www.horsecaravanholidays.ireland.ie.

On Water

CRUISING

Dingle Boatmen's Association runs trips to see **Fungie**, the dolphin, all day, every day; you have to book a separate trip and wear a wet suit to swim with him. ☎ (066) 915-0768.

Lily of Killarney **Watercoach** has a number of daily sailings from Ross Castle, Killarney, the first at 10:30 am, the last at 5:45 pm. Book at Deros Office, Main Street, Killarney, ☎ (064) 31251.

You can also go on **Eco-Trips** from Dingle Marina. ☎ (086) 285-8802.

Safari runs Eco-Nature cruises from Kenmare Pier, lasting two hours, with free tea, coffee, snacks and use of binoculars, charts and books, with friendly and informative guides. Half- and full-day fishing expeditions, with all gear supplied; and kayaking, sailing, skiing, tube rides and speed boat rides also available. ☎ (064) 83171.

Near Sneem, **Derrynane Seasports** offers classes in wake boarding, surfing, canoeing, sailing, other watersports, with equipment hire, ☎ (087) 908-1208 (mobile); www.sneem.com.

Jamie Knox, Castlegregory, Co. Kerry, provides accommodation, lessons, and rents equipment to those interested in windsurfing, surfing, sailing, wake-boarding. ☎ (066) 713-9411; www.jamieknox.com.

Activity Ireland, Caherdaniel, offers a variety of water and land based activities, ☎ (066) 947-5277; info@activity-ireland.com, www.activity-ireland.com.

Valentia Watersports on Valentia Island, which can be reached by road or by ferry, has a number of different courses for divers, and will also help arrange accommodation for visitors. ☎ (066) 947-6204; fax 947-6367; info@divevalentia.ie; www.divevalentia.ie.

With **Ballinskelligs Watersports**, you can take trips to dive around the Skelligs, beautiful and historic islands, which are very popular with divers from all over the world. The company has two permits to dive there, which is unique. They also run boat trips. ☎ (066) 947-9182; enquiries@skelligboats.com; www.skelligboats.com.

FISHING

Cork and Kerry have over 100 fishable loughs and miles upon miles of superb salmon, sea trout and brown trout rivers. The environment is fresh, clean and virtually unspoiled, and the gentle warmth of the Gulf Stream ensures a comfortable climate year-round.

The southwest is rich in game, coarse and sea angling and many of its fisheries are world-famous, such as **Lough Currane** in Waterville, Co. Kerry, regarded by many as one of the truly great sea trout fisheries, or **Inniscarra Lake**, Co. Cork, the region's premier coarse an-

gling fishery. Remember that a State license is needed for salmon and sea trout fishing, and that the owner of game fishing waters probably charges a daily fee as well. You'll find lots of information on the **South Western Regional Fisheries Board** Web site. Contact the SWRFB. ☎ (026) 41221; fax 41223; www.swrfb.com.

FISHING PERMIT DISTRIBUTORS

- **T.W. Murray& Co. Ltd.**, 87 Patrick St, Cork. ☎ (021) 427-1089
- **Brian Toomey Sports & Leisure**, 18 McCurtain Street, Fermoy, ☎ (025) 31101
- **Jeffersports**, 7 Pearse St., Bandon, ☎ (023) 41133

DEEP-SEA ANGLING

There are sea angling centers in both counties – ask at tourist offices, tackle shops or look at the regional fisheries board Web site (details above).

Good shore and beach angling is available in many parts of both counties, but you should always be aware of the dangers of fishing from ledges, especially in rough or windy weather and never fish alone.

OTHER USEFUL CONTACTS

Maritime Tourism Limited, Castlepark, Kinsale, organizes trout angling at Ballyhass Lakes at Cecilstown near Mallow. They rent all equipment, including boats. ☎ (021) 477-4959; fax 477-4958; maritime@indigo.ie.

The River Ilen Anglers Club, for salmon and trout fishing on the river near Skibbereen, can be contacted at Fallons, North Street, Skibbereen. ☎ (028) 22264.

Clontackle and Leisure Limited, Spillers Lane, Clonakilty, supplies fishing and outdoor equipment. They also run shore and boat trips, specializing in bass fishing. ☎/fax (023) 35580.

On Horseback

Killarney Riding Stables is just a mile outside Killarney, and here visitors can enjoy rides lasting from one to three hours. There's also the option of the six-day Killarney Reeks Trail. Open all year. ☎ (064) 31686; fax 34119.

Eagle Rock Equestrian Centre is at Caherdaniel on the shore of Derrynane Bay on the Ring of Kerry. Horses and ponies are available to suit all levels, with instruction if needed. ☎ (066) 947-5145; www.eaglerockcentre.com.

Burkes Horse Trekking Centre, Glenbeigh, on the edge of Rossbeigh beach, offers wonderful coastal treks. ☎ (066) 976-8872.

Coláiste Ide Stables, Dingle, specializes in lessons for all levels and in treks. They are open year-round. ☎ (066) 915-9100.

Dingle Horse Riding has hourly, daily and weekly rates for riding in the beautiful Dingle Peninsula. It also has two luxury apartments available for rent on a weekly basis. ☎ (066) 915-2199; www.dingle-horseriding.com.

Longs Riding Center at Kilcolman, Ventry, near Dingle, has horses to suit all riders, with hourly, daily and three-day trail rides available. ☎ (066) 915-9034; info@longsriding.com; www.longsriding.com.

◆ Golf

Killarney Golf Club

Among the best-known golf courses in Kerry is **Ballybunion**, where US President Bill Clinton played; there's a statue of him in the little seaside town, and they're using him in their marketing of a Stay-and-Play program. If you stay in certain hotels or guesthouses, you get guaranteed tee times. Find out about it by looking at www.EasyGolfBallybunion.com. Otherwise, contact them at Ballybunion Golf Course, ☎ (068) 27146; fax 27387; bbgolfc@iol.ie; www.ballybuniongolfclub.ie.

Killarney Golf Club has two 18-hole parkland courses set in beautiful scenery. ☎ (064) 31034; fax 33065; reservations@killarney-golf.com; www.killarney-golf.com.

Five minutes from Killarney is the nine-hole course surrounded by mountains and woodlands of the **Ross Golf Club**. ☎ (064) 31125; fax 31860.

- ***Beaufort Golf Club**, ☎ (064) 44440; fax 44752; beaufortgc@eircom.net.*

- ***Dooks Golf Club**, Killorglin. ☎ (066) 976-8205; fax 976-8476; office@dooks.com; www.dooks.com.*
- ***Kenmare Golf Club**, close to town center. ☎ (064) 41291; fax 42061.*
- ***Ceann Sibeal Golf Club** at Ballyferriter on the western end of the Dingle Peninsula. ☎ (066) 915-6255; fax 915-6409.*
- ***Castlegregory Golf and Fishing Club** has a nine-hole course and is on the northern side of the Dingle Peninsula. ☎ (066) 713-9444.*

◆ Where to Stay

Hotels

ACCOMMODATIONS

$ . . . . . under $60
$$. $61-120
$$$. $121-182
$$$$. $183-243
$$$$$. . . . . over $244

☆☆☆ **The Brandon Hotel**, Princes Street, Tralee, is a welcoming and pleasant place to stay. There are 184 rooms, including 22 deluxe rooms and two suites on the fifth floor. It's worth asking for a room at the front on an upper floor, as from there you'll have a wonderful view of Tralee and its surroundings. There's a choice of where to eat, as the bar has a very good menu, and the Galleon Restaurant uses fresh farm produce and locally caught fish. There's lots of parking opposite for a nominal fee. Rates from $$, with special breaks available. ☎ (066) 712-3333; sales@brandonhotel.ie; www.brandonhotel.ie.

The hotel also runs the Brandon Inn, a separate facility whose 49 ensuite rooms sleep up to three adults or two adults and two children; bar and breakfast room are extra; however, Inn guests have full use of Hotel facilities, including leisure center. Per room $107; reservations@brandonhotel.ie.

☆☆☆ The family-run **Brook Lodge Hotel**, High Street, Killarney, and in the center of town in its own large gardens. It has a restaurant and bar. From $$. ☎ (o64) 31800, fax 35001, www.brooklodgekillarney.com, brooklodgekillarney@eircom.net.

☆☆☆ The **Listowel Arms Hotel** on the Square in Listowel is a welcoming and traditional hotel, which offers good value to the visitor. It

has 37 bedrooms, pleasantly furnished, and it serves wholesome Irish food– including huge portions of stew. Its bar is popular with locals, so it's a great place for a chat, and there's often entertainment laid on. Rates from $$. ☎ (068) 21500; fax 22524; www.listowelarms.com, info@listowelarms.com.

Historic Places

Coolclogher House, Mill Road, Killarney, belongs to The Hidden Ireland group of historic private houses. It offers a stay with a difference as, with only four bedrooms for guests, it's almost like staying with friends. Coolclogher was built in the early 19th century and is surrounded by 68 acres of grounds, yet is just over a mile from busy Killarney. The bedrooms are spacious. There are lovely views of the grounds and the surrounding countryside with the National Park and mountains in the distance. There's also a conservatory, built around a camelia which is 170 years old, where guests can relax. Open March to November. Rates from $$. ☎ (064) 35996; fax 30933; info@coolclogherhouse.com, www.coolclogherhouse.com.

☆☆☆☆ **The Caragh Lodge Country House & Restaurant** was originally a fishing lodge and stands on the shore of Caragh Lake, near Killorglin. It is the ideal place to stay for salmon and trout fishing, and in the summer guests can swim or go boating. The Lodge is surrounded by a fine garden, which has won awards. It has 15 bedrooms and is open from April 25 to mid-October. Seafood, wild salmon and locally produced lamb feature on the menu, and non-residents can dine here – reservations recommended. Rates from $$$. ☎ (066) 976-9115; fax 976-9316; caragh@iol.ie; www.caraghlodge.com.

Horse-Drawn Holiday

Wander the roads of County Kerry with reins in your hand, and no fixed routes. You can set off from the Dingle Peninsula or Killarney. Contact **Slatterys Horse Drawn Caravans**, Russell Street, Tralee. ☎ (066) 718-6240; www.horsecaravanholidays.ireland.ie.

Camping & RV Parks

The most westerly campsite in Europe is **Campaíl Teach An Aragail** or **Oratory House Camping** on the Dingle Peninsula, close to the historic Gallarus Oratory and other interesting archaeological sites and long distance walking routes. It has its own pub restaurant and information

center for activities such as bird- and whale-watching. Open Easter to late September. ☎ (066) 915-5143; tp@iol.ie.

☆ **Ballintaggart House Budget Accommodation** is a camping site near Dingle on the grounds of a hunting lodge built in 1703. It's open May to end September. ☎ (066) 915-1454; fax 915-2207; info@dingleaccommodation.com; www.dingleaccommodation.com.

☆☆☆☆ **Ring of Kerry Camping and Caravan Park** has beautiful views of Kenmare Bay. Open April to end September. ☎ (064) 41648; fax 41631; info@kerrycamping.com.

☆☆☆☆ **Glenross** is at Glenbeigh on the Ring of Kerry. Open May to mid-September. ☎ (066) 976-8451 from May to August; (064) 31590 rest of year; glenross@eircom.net; www.killarneycamping.com.

☆☆☆☆ **Parklands Holiday Park** is at Ballybunion, and its facilities include a tennis court. Mobile homes are available to rent. Park open from May to end of September. ☎ (068) 27275.

☆☆ **Goosey Island Campsite** is in Sneem on the Ring of Kerry, and is open mid-April to mid-October. ☎ (064) 45577; fax 45181; washer@oceanfree.net; www.gooseyisland.com.

There's a choice of parks near Killarney:

☆☆☆ **Beech Grove** is open mid-April to mid-October. It has mobile homes to rent. ☎ (064) 31727.

☆☆☆☆ **Flemings White Bridge** is open mid-March to end October, with mobile homes available for rent. ☎ (064) 31590; fax 37474; fwbcamping@eircom.net; www.killarneycamping.com.

☆☆☆☆ **Fossa** also has mobile homes to rent. Open April to end September. ☎ (064) 31497; fax 34459; fossaholidays@eircom.net; www.camping-holidaysireland.com.

☆☆☆☆ **Flesk** is open mid-April to end September. ☎ (064) 31704; fax 35439; killarneylakes@eircom.net.

☆☆ **White Villa Farm** is on the N22 very close to the town of Killarney. Open April to mid-October. ☎ (064) 20671; killarneycamping@eircom.net; www.killarneycaravanpark.com.

Wests Caravan Park is unclassified, and is on the road to Killarney at Killorglin. Mobile homes available to rent. Open April to end October. ☎ (066) 976-1240; fax 976-1833; enquiries@westcaravans.com.

☆☆ **Bayview** is a mobile home and touring RV park at Tralee, where mobile homes are available for rent. Open May to October. ☎ (066) 712-6140; bayviewtralee@eircom.net.

☆☆☆☆ **Woodlands Park** is also at Tralee. It's open from the middle of March to the end of September. ☎ (066) 712-1235; fax 718-1199; wdlands@eircom.net; www.discoverkerry.com/holiday.

☆☆☆ **Sir Roger's Caravan and Camping Park** is at Banna Beach, near Ardfert. Open April to November. ☎ (066) 713-4730; fax 713-4861; sirrogerscaravanpark@hotmail.com.

☆☆ **Creveen Lodge** is on the **Healy Pass** road, the R574, at Lauragh. Open Easter to end October. ☎ (064) 83131; info@creveenlodge.com; www.creveenlodge.com.

☆☆☆☆ **Wave Crest** is on the Ring of Kerry at Caherdaniel. Open mid-March to mid-October. ☎/fax (066) 947-5188; wavecrest@eircom.net; www.wavecrestcamping.com.

☆☆☆ **Glenbeg** is also on the Ring of Kerry at Caherdaniel. It's next to a sandy beach. Open mid-April to early October. ☎ (066) 947-5182; glenbeg@eircom.net.

☆☆ **Casey's** is in the middle of the village of Ballyheigue and is open from early May to mid-September. ☎ (066) 713-3195; fax 713-3255.

☆☆☆ **Mannix Point** camping and RV park is at Caherciveen surrounded by mountains on three sides and facing out to the Atlantic. It's open from mid-March to October 1. ☎ (066) 947-2806; fax 947-2028; mannixpoint@mail.com; www.campinginkerry.com.

☆☆☆☆ The **Anchor Caravan Park** is at Castlegregory and is open from Easter to end September. ☎ (066) 713-9157; anchorcaravanpark@eircom.net.

Hostels

There are more hostels in counties Cork and Kerry than in any other part of the island, many of them in beautiful locations. Most, but not all, belong to the **Independent Holiday Hostels of Ireland**, ☎ (01) 836-4700; info@hostels-ireland.com; www.hostels-ireland.com.

◆ Where to Eat

Among the many pubs all over the county offering food as well as musical entertainment is **Larkins Pub and Restaurant** on Main Street, Milltown, which is a village surrounded by the McGillycuddy Reeks on one side and the Slieve Mish Mountains on the other. Breakfast, lunch and evening meals are available. ☎ (066) 976-7217; fax 976-7515.

The Danny Mann Pub is part of Eviston House Hotel on New Street, Killarney, and has attracted tourists over many years for its entertainment, as well as for its food. You can enjoy a hearty meal while listening to traditional Irish music and watching Irish dancing. ☎ (064) 31640; fax 33685; evishtl@eircom.net; www.dannymann.ie.

Gaby's Seafood Restaurant, High Street, Killarney, is open Mondays to Saturdays for dinner, from 6 to 10 pm. Seafood, steaks and vegetarian dishes are included on the menu. ☎ (064) 32519.

Keanes of Curraheen is on the N86 main road from Tralee to Dingle, four miles from Tralee. It's a pub with a restaurant and offers good food at reasonable prices. It's open every day from 11:30 am to 11:30 pm. ☎ (066) 712-8054.

Nick's Restaurant in Killorglin is a family-run business that was founded over 25 years ago. It only opens for dinner in the evening and has a good choice of dishes, specialiszing in seafood. A pianist entertains as you examine the menu or enjoy a drink before or after dinner in their lounge. ☎ (066) 976-1219; fax 976-1233.

Mac's Restaurant & Dairy Ice-Cream Parlour in the middle of town on Main Street, Killarney, is where to go for delicious home baking and homemade ice cream sundaes. Mac's ice cream is made using only the best natural wholesome ingredients and is now distributed to shops and other restaurants throughout Kerry and farther afield. ☎ (064) 35213; macsicecream@eircom.net; www.macsicecream.com.

Halfway between Glenbeigh and Cahirciveen on the Ring of Kerry at Kells is **Pat's Craft Shop and Restaurant**. There's also a food store, gas station and post office, so it's a great place to stop. The restaurant also has the advantage of looking out over Dingle Bay. ☎ (066) 947-7601; fax 947-7660; www.patscraftshop.com, info@patscraftshop.com.

The Vestry Restaurant and Bar, Tenplenoe, Greenane, which is on the Ring of Kerry and a 10-minute drive from Kenmare, is a very special place. It's in a beautifully restored 18th-century church, and only opened as a restaurant recently. There's space for 60, some upstairs in the Minstrel Gallery. When the weather is suitable you can also sit outside in the Vestry garden overlooking Kenmare Bay. Choices include venison, sea trout and ostrich; there's a vegetarian menu and there are daily specials. Open from 12:30 daily, with last orders for dinner at 9 pm. Bar snacks available from 12:30 to 5 pm. Early Bird menu from 5-6:30 pm; Sunday lunch 12:30-3:30pm. ☎/fax (064) 41958; davidhillier@oceanfree.net; www.neidin.net/vestry.

The Wild Banks restaurant in the middle of Dingle is open for dinner from March until January 6, daily except Monday. Lunch is available from July to September, and the restaurant has an Early Bird menu from 6 to 8 pm, as well as an à la carte dinner menu. ☎ (066) 915-2888; thewildbanks@eircom.net; www.thewildbanks.com.

The Shannon Region

Counties **Clare** and **Limerick** are marketed by Fáilte Ireland as the Shannon Region, which also takes in parts of the neighboring counties of Tipperary, Kerry and Offaly. See those chapters for information about other counties that make up this region.

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Getting Here

By Air

You can fly directly to this region from North America to **Shannon Airport** in Co. Clare, which is exactly halfway between Ennis and Limerick City, 10 miles (16 km) to either destination. There are regular buses from the airport to both Limerick and Ennis. You can also get to this part of the country by car, train or bus, or fly from Dublin.

By Rail

Limerick City is connected by rail to mainline services for Dublin, Cork, Waterford and other areas, and there is a limited rail service between the city and Ennis. For information, ☎ 1-850-366-222 within Ireland or, from outside of Ireland, ☎ 353 1-836-6222, www.irishrail.ie.

By Bus

The **Expressway** bus service operates between Limerick City and Cork to the south and on to Ballina, Co. Mayo, to the north, stopping in Ennis. There are also Expressway services between Limerick and Dublin. Bus services connect most of the main towns and villages around both counties to Ennis and Limerick City. Contact bus stations for details.

BUS SCHEDULE & SERVICE INFORMATION

- Limerick, ☎ (061) 313-333
- Ennis, ☎ (065) 682-4177

County Clare

From the limestone region of the Burren in the northwest to the undulating hills in the east, Clare is a fascinating area to visit, with its contrasting landscapes. The county is almost surrounded by water, with the wide estuary of the River Shannon to the south, the rugged Atlantic coastline along the west and Lough Derg to the east.

The area boasts some of the most wonderful beaches in the country, the majority deserted for much of the year. If you are lucky with clear weather you will also experience unforgettable sunsets, looking west over the Atlantic, when it appears that the sun is setting fire to the sea as it sinks below the horizon.

County Clare was one of the first areas of Ireland to develop tourism, with the idea of catering in particular to North Americans arriving at Shannon Airport. In recent years, there has been a decline in the numbers landing here due to the compulsory stopover being abandoned.

The county town is **Ennis**, and its other main towns are **Kilrush** and **Kilkee** in the west, and **Killaloe** to the east.

◆ Getting Here & Getting Around

By Road

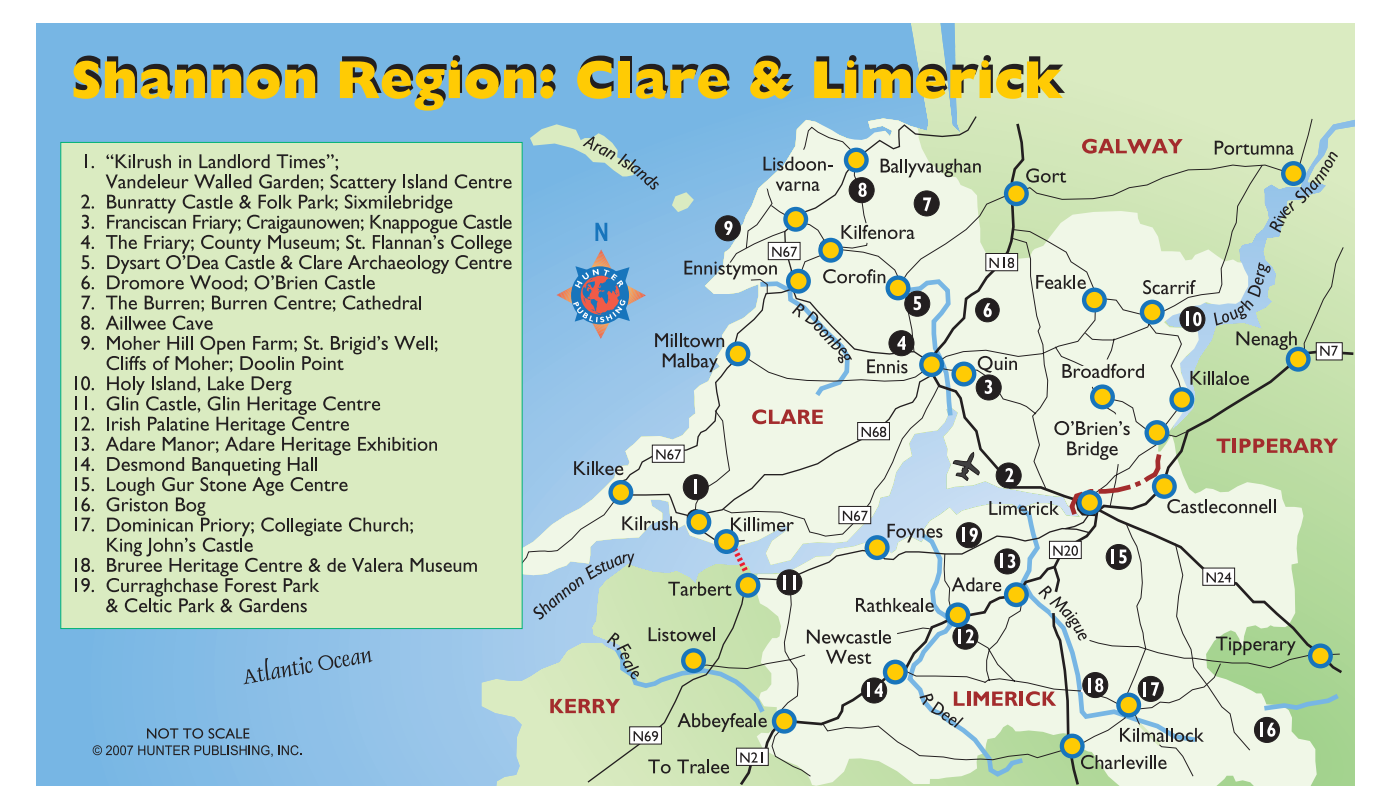
The main roads in Co. Clare are the N18 from Ennis north to Galway and south to Limerick; the N85 from Ennis to Ennistymon and on to Ballyvaughan; and the N65 to Kilrush. The N67 links Kilkee with towns and villages near or on the coast, including Milltown Malbay, Lahinch and Ennistymon.

By Car Ferry

If you're traveling to Clare from County Kerry by road, you can avoid Limerick altogether by using the car ferry from Tarbert to Killimer, seven miles (11 km) off the N68 near Kilrush. If you are traveling south from Clare to Kerry, take the N67 coast road. The ferry runs

Shannon Region: Clare & Limerick

1. "Kilrush in Landlord Times"; Vandeleur Walled Garden; Scattery Island Centre
2. Bunratty Castle & Folk Park; Sixmilebridge
3. Franciscan Friary; Craigaunowen; Knappogue Castle
4. The Friary; County Museum; St. Flannan's College
5. Dysart O'Dea Castle & Clare Archaeology Centre
6. Dromore Wood; O'Brien Castle
7. The Burren; Burren Centre; Cathedral
8. Aillwee Cave
9. Moher Hill Open Farm; St. Brigid's Well; Cliffs of Moher; Doolin Point
10. Holy Island, Lake Derg
11. Glin Castle, Glin Heritage Centre
12. Irish Palatine Heritage Centre
13. Adare Manor; Adare Heritage Exhibition
14. Desmond Banqueting Hall
15. Lough Gur Stone Age Centre
16. Griston Bog
17. Dominican Priory; Collegiate Church; King John's Castle
18. Bruree Heritage Centre & de Valera Museum
19. Curraghchase Forest Park & Celtic Park & Gardens



NOT TO SCALE

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daily, from 7 am to 9 pm, all year except Christmas Day; from Killimer on the Clare side it departs on the hour, and from Tarbert it leaves on the half-hour (last ferry is at 9:30 pm). **Shannon Ferry Ltd**, Killimer. ☎ (065) 905-3124; fax 905-3125; enquiries@shannonferries.com; www.shannonferries.com.

◆ Tourist Information

Local information: www.shannonregiontourism.ie

Fáilte Ireland offices:

- ***Arthur's Row**, off O'Connell Street, Ennis, open all year. ☎ (065) 682-8366.*
- ***Arrivals Hall**, Shannon Airport, open all year. ☎ (061) 471-664*
- *Open in tourist season:*
- ***Cliffs of Moher**, near Liscannor, ☎ (065) 708-1171*
- ***The Square**, Kilkee, open May-September, ☎ (065) 905-6112*
- ***Moore Street**, Kilrush, open May-September, ☎ (065) 905-1577*
- ***The Bridge**, Killaloe, open May-October, ☎ (061) 376-866*

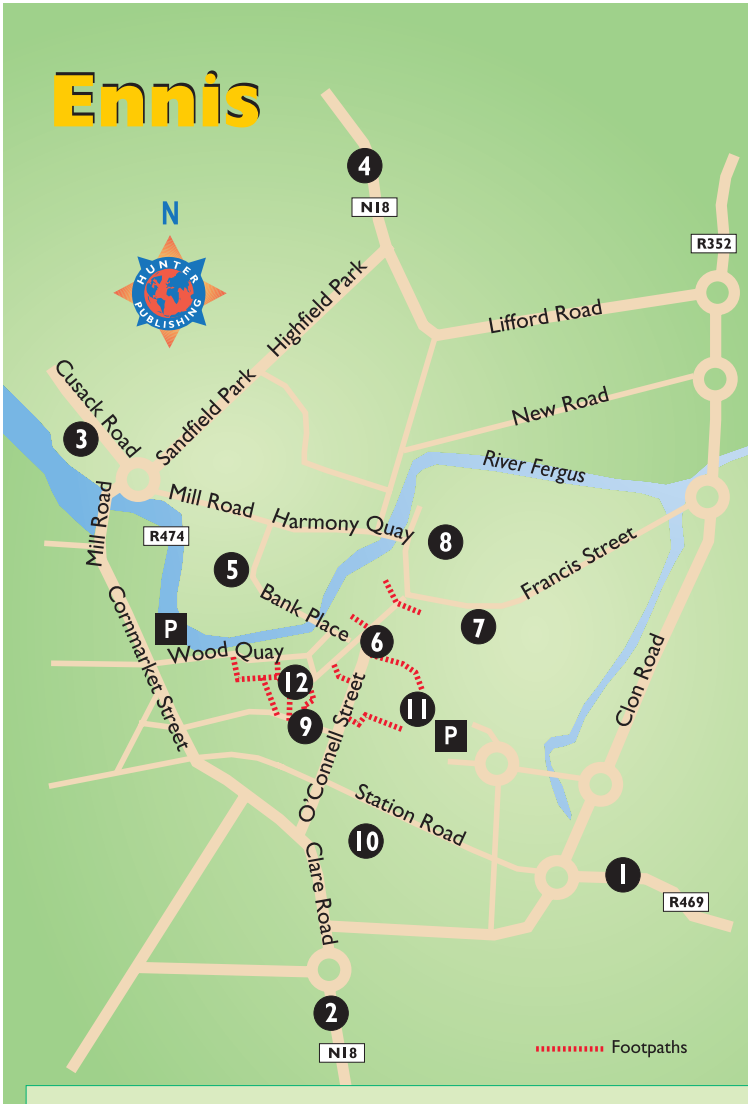
TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

Clare Heritage Centre, Corofin, eight miles from Ennis, operates year-round. Housed in a historic church it has a museum about life in 19th-century Ireland. Open Monday to Friday, year-round. 9.30am-5.30pm. ☎ (065) 683-7955; www.clareroots.com.

◆ West Clare

Ennis

Ennis is the county town of Clare and always pleasantly busy. It takes its name from the Irish word *inis* (lake), and stands on the River Fergus. Its streets are narrow and attractive, some of them pedestrianized, and it is worth stopping here for at least a few hours. Many people come here for traditional music, and every May the town hosts ***Fleadh Nua***, an international celebration of Irish culture. Ennis looks to the future as well as its past, and is Ireland's first Information Age Town, with the largest community technology project in the country.



1. To Quin, Knappogue Castle
2. To Bunratty & Dromoland Castles, Shannon, Limerick
3. N85 to the Burrens, Cliffs of Moher, O'Brien's Tower
4. To Galway, Slieve Aughty Mts.
5. St. Columba's Anglican Church
6. O'Connell Monument
7. Franciscan Friary
8. Ruins of Ennis Friary
9. Market Place
10. St. Peter & Paul's
11. Shopping Centre
12. High Street, Abbey Street

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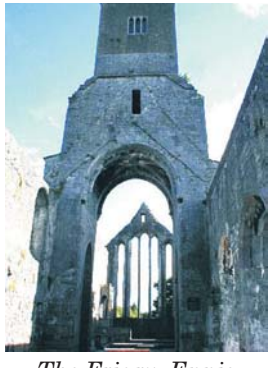
NOT TO SCALE

The county is closely associated with **Daniel O'Connell**, who was elected as its Member of Parliament, leading to Catholic Emancipation in 1829 – and later earning Clare the name "Banner County" from the banners carried during rallies and meetings. A monument to O'Connell dominates the narrow main street named after him.

Ennis has been multicultural for decades, more so than most Irish towns, as refugees from Cuba arrived at Shannon, having gotten off flights to the USSR. They've been joined by every nationality in recent years, and that's reflected in the range of shops and restaurants, as well as the faces you see on its streets. Because of its central location, Ennis is the ideal place to stay while you explore counties Clare, Tipperary and Galway.



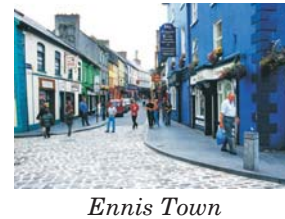
The Friary, Ennis

The Friary, Abbey Street, was founded by the O'Briens in the 13th century. Many of its original features survive and it's well worth visiting. It's in the care of the State Heritage Service, and guided tours are available. Open June to mid-September daily, 10 am-6 pm; April, May, late September, October, open daily except Monday until 5 pm. ☎/fax (065) 682-9100; ennisfriary@ealga.ie.

Just off O'Connell Street is the **County Museum** with its Riches of Clare exhibition (admission free). From June to September, the museum is open daily; from October to December, Tuesday to Saturday; from March to May, Monday to Saturday; year-round hours are 9:30-5. ☎ (065) 682-3382; fax 684-2119; claremuseum@eircom.net; www.clarelibrary.ie. The Tourist Information office is in the same building.

SHOPPING

There are lots of fascinating shops in Ennis selling everything from designer fashions to locally produced crafts. My favorite hardware shop in the country is **Rohans** on Parnell Street. Take a peek inside and see



Ennis Town

the enormous range available – literally everything from needles to saucepans, and a lot more besides. If you're camping or cooking for yourself, you'll find it a useful resource.

In the center of town there's an open-air market. Some stalls are open on weekdays, augmented by many more on Saturdays. There are two secondhand book shops just off Market Square.

The **Book Gallery** specializes in books of Irish interest, and also carries general stock. Owner Sean Spellissy is a great source of local knowledge and has written a few books himself, including *Clare, County of Contrast* and *The Ennis Compendium* – a terrific guide to the town and its history, with delightful line drawings. Look out also for the wonderful works produced by CLASP, (the Clare Local Studies Project). Among its titles are *Archaeology of the Burren* and *The Strangers Gaze: Travels in Co. Clare 1534-1950*. The shop upstairs also has great bargains, mostly in fiction. The **Ennis Book Shop** on Abbey Street is where to go for new titles.

ENTERTAINMENT

There are music sessions in many of the town's pubs; watch for signs or ask locally. ***Glór***, the Irish music centre on Friar's Walk, has an interesting program all year round, and also hosts exhibitions. ☎ (065) 684-3103; fax 684-5372; info@glor.ie; www.glor.ie.

There's a multi-screen cinema on Parnell Street.

HAVE A SWIM

Ennis Leisure Complex is open weekdays from 8 am to 10 pm, Saturdays from 10 am and Sundays 10 am to 6 pm. Sessions start on the hour and some are pre-booked, so phone to check. ☎ (065) 682-1604; leisurecomplex@clarecoco.ie; www.clare.ie.

TAKE A STROLL

Skirting the grounds of **St. Flannan's College**, on the Limerick edge of Ennis, is the Rocky Road, which is perfect for a short and quiet stroll. There are lots of wildflowers and if you're lucky you'll see rabbits and other animals. Look for wandering cows that graze here between the limestone outcrops.

Shannon Heritage *runs eight sites, in counties Clare, Limerick, and one in Co. Galway, which you can find on www.shannonheritage.com. They include* ***King John's Castle*** *in Limerick City,* ***Bunratty Castle*** *(below) and* ***Folk Park*** *in Co. Clare, and* ***Dunguaire Castle****, Kinvara, Co. Galway.*

Just north of Ennis at Ruan, off the N18 to Galway, is **Dromore Wood**, a nature reserve covering 1,000 acres. It's a lovely place for a walk. Because of its different habitats, it has a great variety of flora and fauna, including callows, limestone pavement, reed beds and woodland. There are also a number of historic ruins to be seen, including the 17th-century **O'Brien castle** by the lake, two ring forts and a lime kiln. The castle is open all year, daylight hours, and admission is free. The Visitor Centre is open mid-June to mid-September, 10 am to 6 pm. ☎ (065) 683-7166.

Bunratty

Bunratty Castle

South of Ennis on the N18 to Limerick is **Bunratty Castle and Folk Park**. It's high on the list of top visitor attractions, but don't worry – that doesn't mean it's crowded, as the site is big enough to absorb a lot of people. If you know little about Ireland, go there at the beginning of your vacation as it gives you a good idea of how we lived in earlier times. Entire buildings of various sizes and dates have been taken apart and reassembled here.

Bunratty Castle overlooks the river Shannon. Once the stronghold of the O'Briens, kings and later earls of Thomond, it reflects their style and power. Its Great Hall has a very fine collection of 14th-century furniture, paintings and wall hangings. Open all year, 9:30 am to 5:30 pm; June-August, 9 am to 6:30 pm. Note that last admission to the castle is 4 pm all year, so go there before visiting the Folk Park. There's a tea room and a good gift shop. **Mac's Pub** on the village street serves

lunches and snacks. It stays open after the Folk Park closes, with frequent music sessions.

EVENING ENTERTAINMENT

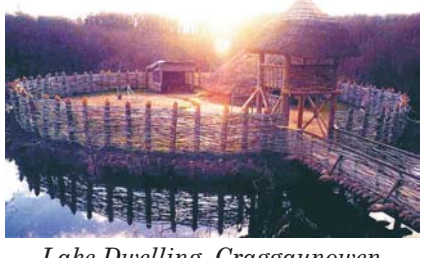
There are Irish Nights in the **Corn Barn** in Bunratty Folk Park from April-October, with dance, music and song, food and wine. You can also join in the fun at a medieval banquet in one of three castles run by Shannon Heritage, with plenty of entertainment as well as food and drink. **Bunratty** medieval banquets run year-round. At **Knappogue Castle** they go from April to October, and at **Dunguaire Castle** from May to October, subject to demand. Times for all three are 5:30 pm and 8:45 pm.

For information and to book banquets or the Irish Nights, ☎ (061) 360-788 or ask at tourist offices.

As in most other areas of the country, you'll see much more if you don't keep to the main roads. While you're in the Bunratty area, wander through the little villages, including **Sixmilebridge**, which has a lovely pub, **The Greyhound**, right on the river bank, with waterfowl to watch as you relax over a drink or snack outdoors. Nearby is **Quin**, on the R469, seven miles (11 km) from Ennis, with its well-preserved 15th-century **Franciscan Friary**, founded by the Macnamaras.

A Fascinating Re-Creation

Near Quin is **Craggaunowen**, one of my favorite places to visit. It's a re-creation of how we lived in previous centuries, with a crannóg (lake dwelling), ring fort, *souterrain* or underground dwelling, all around the castle, built in 1550. The castle has wonderful European wood carvings. It all nestles in quiet countryside. The late John Hunt and his wife Gertrude bought the land, restored the castle and generously handed the



Lake Dwelling, Craggaunowen

project over to the State. Their collection is now shown at the Hunt Museum in Limerick (see page 349).

Even if you're not interested in history, you'd enjoy a stroll here, looking at animals including wild boar and Soya sheep, species bred in pre-historic times. The Celts were great seafarers, and St. Brendan the Navigator may have discovered America before Columbus. Tim Severin, a contemporary adventurer, built a replica of Brendan's leather-hulled boat, which he sailed to Greenland; it's displayed here. There's also a charming tea room. Open May to the end of September, 10 am-6 pm.

SOUTERRAINS

These were primarily man-made underground passages that served as places for safe storage and for refuge, and as secret means of entering or leaving defended places, particularly during the period of Viking raids in the 9th and 10th centuries. Some were simple passages, while others were complex labyrinths.

Knappogue Castle

Knappogue Castle

Also near Quin is Knappogue Castle, built by the Macnamaras in 1467. They owned it until 1815, except during the Civil Wars, when Cromwell used it as his headquarters and thus saved it from the destruction he wrought elsewhere.

Much enlarged in the 19th century, it was used in 1921 as a secret meeting place by the Republican Clare County Council. It had become a ruin by 1966, when it was bought and restored by Mr. and Mrs. Andrews of Houston, Texas. It's been open to the public since 1969. Open May to September, Friday to Tuesday, 9:30 am-5:30 pm and for medieval banquets (see above).

The West Clare Railway

Head southwest out of Ennis on the N68. On the N67 road between Kilrush and Kilkee, you come to the Moyasta railway junction. Here you can take a short trip in a couple of carriages on a section of the West Clare railway, restored by local enthusiasts, and you also visit the little station. The railway used to carry passengers from Ennis through Corofin, Ennistymon, Lahinch, Miltown Malbay, Quilty, and south to Kilrush until the line closed in the 1960s. I remember the excitement of traveling on it to the sea in childhood. It was immortalized in the song *Are ye right there, Michael, are ye right there?* by Percy French. It's an absolute delight. At Ennis Station one of the original engines is on display. ☎ (065) 905-1284.

Kilrush

Kilrush is one of the country's Heritage Towns. It has a very wide main street with some fine 18th-century buildings. It's a good place to shop, and there are plenty of pubs and restaurants where you can have a snack or meal. In the Town Hall there's an exhibition called **Kilrush in Landlord Times**. ☎ (065) 905-1577; www.westclare.com.

A GARDEN WALK

The **Vandeleur Walled Garden** is on the river and set among 420 acres of woodland. Many unusual and tender plants thrive here and there are other features, including a maze, and woodland trails to follow, plus a coffee and gift shop. Open daily all year from 10 am; April to October until 5 pm; closes at 4:30 pm other months. ☎ (065) 905-1760; kilrush@clarecoco.ie; www.kilrush.ie.

SCATTERY ISLAND

The Scattery Island Centre on Merchant's Quay, Kilrush, is the place to go for information about this island, just off the coast, and its sixth-century monastery, founded by St. Senan. Admission is free to the Centre, and it's open mid-June to mid-September daily, 10 am to 6 pm. Call to check times off-season. ☎/fax (065) 905-2139; scatteryisland@ealga.ie.

Kilkee

Kilkee, just north of Kilrush, has a beautiful horseshoe-shaped bay, with a beach that is safe for swimmers. It's been a popular resort for years, and there are some fine houses dating from the late 19th and early 20th century overlooking the sea. Many of these were the summer homes of people living elsewhere, or were rented out to visitors by residents.

With the growth in package vacations to sunnier destinations, resorts like Kilkee lost a lot of their popularity among the Irish, but that's to the visitor's advantage. It's quite peaceful now. It's an attractive and friendly little town, with wonderful walks around the cliffs, and is particularly popular for diving.

Spanish Point

Head northwest out of Ennis on the N85 and either continue on to Ennistymon, before turning south along the coast; or turn left at Inagh (where there's a microbrewery) onto the R460, which takes you west to Miltown Malbay and Spanish Point.

Miltown Malbay is a market town with plenty of small shops, restaurants and pubs. The town is known for its annual **Willie Clancy Week**, which draws thousands of fans of traditional music, who come to learn as well as listen and enjoy themselves.

Spanish Point has sand dunes and a long beach; swimming here can be treacherous, although in summer there are lifeguards on duty. It's named after the Spanish Armada, which was wrecked all along Ireland's west coast, and there's a memorial near the beach. It's very popular with surfers and is great for a walk along the dunes, where there's the Spanish Point Golf Club, ☎ (065) 708-4198, www.spanish-point.com. Just outside the town of Miltown Malbay, near the coast, a welter of small roads, four or five of them, meet at the doorstep of a fine and spacious pub – the **Crosses of Annagh**, which is very popular for its music and traditional dancing sessions.

As you travel, you'll see the patchwork of little fields divided by drystone walls, which have withstood the brisk winds off the Atlantic for centuries.

Lahinch & Liscannor

The N67 coast road from Milltown Malbay takes you north to Lahinch, with its lovely safe beach, again popular with surfers. It's an attractive little village and has some good places to eat. If the beach doesn't attract, you can swim in the 82-foot (25 m) pool at Seaworld, which also has an aquarium. ☎ (065) 708-1900; fax 708-1901; enquiries@lahinchseaworld.com; www.iol.ie/~seaworld.

A couple of miles inland is Ennistymon, a larger town with lots of traditional shop fronts and pubs.

Turn left at Lahinch and the R478 takes you to Liscannor, which used to be a quiet and pretty fishing village, but has changed with the building of an ugly new hotel near the pier as you enter town and lots of new houses dwarfing the more traditional cottages.

After the village, just as the road starts to climb, you come to the **Liscannor Stone Story & Rock Shop**, where you can learn about ancient quarrying around the Cliffs of Moher and buy fossils, minerals and gems from around the world. ☎ (065) 708-1930.

On the way to the Cliffs of Moher, you come to the turning on your right for **Moher Hill Open Farm**, which has a variety of rare breeds, and you can enjoy a quiet walk in lovely surroundings. There's also a teashop. Open Monday-Saturday, 10 am-6 pm, Sunday, noon-6 pm. ☎ (065) 708-1071.

A couple of miles farther on you come to **St. Brigid's Well** on the left. Its entrance has been "improved" recently, but inside it looks as it has for centuries, with tokens and notes begging for the saint's intercession hanging on the wall.

There's yet another route to the coast from Ennis; this is the R474, via Inch and Connolly, which climbs to give pleasant views of the countryside, including turf beds on the slopes of **Mount Callan**.

The Cliffs of Moher

The Cliffs of Moher, one of Europe's most spectacular coastal features, rise to a height of 650 feet (200 m) and extend for about five miles (8 km) into the Atlantic. There are well-worn paths along the cliffs, including a short walk to Hag's Head, and you see lots of guillemots and other sea birds. The cliffs are formed of layers of siltstone,

Cliffs of Moher

shale and sandstone, and look like slices lying on top of each other. Do be careful and don't go near the edge.

There's a Visitor Centre, open all year from 9:30 am to 5:30 pm, and from June-August, 9 am to 7 pm, but I prefer to let this site of outstanding natural beauty speak for itself. Walk up to O'Brien's Tower and look around. There is a fee for parking, even in winter, when there is hardly anyone around.

Continue on from here and you'll come to Lisdoonvarna. On the way you come across what must, in my opinion, be one of the most inappropriate buildings to ever have been given planning permission! The Burren Castle Hotel looks like it was designed for Hollywood and dropped into this beautiful landscape by mistake. Try to forget you saw it.

Doolin

You'll see plenty of signs for the village of Doolin, just off the road on the coast, which is famous worldwide for traditional music. It's worth dropping in to the **Doolin Crafts Gallery and Garden** beside the cemetery, which stocks local and Irish knitwear, ceramics, and jewelry. It also has a café, which is ideal for lunch or afternoon tea. ☎ (065) 707-4511.

The **Aran Islands**, visible from the coast in clear weather, are worth visiting for their traditional way of life. There are ferries each morning from Doolin, returning around 5 pm.

Lisdoonvarna

Lisdoonvarna has been a spa town since the 19th century and today the **Spa Wells Centre** features sulfur baths, massage, saunas and other health facilities. Open June-October. ☎ (065) 7074-023.

The town is best known now for its **Bachelor Festival** in September, founded to find wives for lonely farmers, who came here after the har-

vest was over and before winter set in. It's an attractive little place, with interesting shops and a choice of places to stay and to eat. You can see how local salmon is smoked and buy some to take home at **The Burren Smokehouse** in the town. ☎ (065) 707-4432.

A Unique Landscape

Poulnabrone Dolmen

At Lisdoonvarna you are on the edge of **the Burren**, one of the most unique landscapes in Europe. Before exploring, take a detour to **Kilfenora** and visit the Burren Centre, where the 20-minute audio-visual presentation is the perfect introduction to the region. ☎ (065) 708-8030; burrencentre@eircom.net; www.theburrencentre.ie.

While in Kilfenora, take a look at the **Cathedral** and **Celtic high crosses** in the churchyard, which date from the year 600 AD (see box on page 106). For some strange reason, the parish still belongs to the Holy See in the Vatican. In the village, **Vaughan's Pub** has traditional music and dance on Thursday and Sunday evenings in summer.

The Burren takes its name from *boireann* in Irish, meaning rocky place, and resembles a lunar landscape. It covers over 100 square miles (260 square km), part of it a National Park. It's a truly remarkable area, which attracts visitors for many reasons including its unique flora and its archaeological sites. It's a great area for walking and cycling. Its northern shoreline is starkly beautiful, with gray limestone hills stretching to the blue water of the Atlantic, and inland it's like a giant rock garden, with Arctic, Alpine and Mediterranean plants flourishing together in fertile patches between limestone fissures. It's littered with dolmens, burial chambers and other fascinating archaeological sites, such as the **Poulnabrone Dolmen**, which is 5,000 years old.

Ballyvaughan

Ballyvaughan Bay

On the coast is the pretty little village of Ballyvaughan. **Quinn's Craftshop** on the main street stocks local crafts and fashions. ☎ (065) 707-7052. Every Sunday from May to October local craftspeople hold a Fair at the Ballyvaughan Village Hall. www.burrencrafts.com.

Nearby is the **Burren College of Art** at Newtown Castle, internationally recognized for its full-time courses. From May to August it runs workshops. ☎ (065) 707-7200; fax 707-7201; admin@burrencollege.com; www.burrencollege.com.

SOMETHING DIFFERENT

If you would like to try clay pigeon shooting, contact the **Woodlands Shooting Club** near Ballyvaughan. ☎ (065) 707-4038.

You can also try **sea kayaking** in the sheltered waters of Ballyvaughan Bay. **River Ocean Kayak**, www.riverocean.com, caters to beginners.

VENTURE UNDERGROUND

Just off the R480, south of Ballyvaughan, is the Aillwee Cave, which you can visit, regardless of weather, all year round. You are taken underground by a guide, walking over chasms and under weird formations for a 30-minute stroll that you won't forget. Wear sensible shoes and a warm jacket as it gets cold. The complex also houses craft shops, and you can see cheese and honey being made. There's a restaurant and coffee shop. Open daily, March to October, 10 am to the last tour at 5:30 pm. From November to February, there are six tours daily. ☎ (065) 707-7036; aillwee@eircom.net; www.aillwee.ie.

PERFUMERY & ORGANIC GARDEN

Also in the Burren is Ireland's first perfumery and organic herb garden, founded more than 30 years ago. The **Burren Perfumery and Floral Centre** is at Carron, near the Aillwee Cave, open all year (except Christmas), from 9 am. From June to September, it's open until 7 pm; at other times it closes at 5 pm. Admission is free. You can watch the processes involved, explore the garden, and try samples. ☎ (065) 708-9102; burrenperfumery@eircom.net; www.burrenperfumery.com.

◆ East Clare

The landscape of East Clare is markedly different from the western part of the county. Here the fields are more fertile and trees fringe the roadsides, and the climate is more gentle, away from the winds of the Atlantic.

Lough Derg

Take the R352 from Ennis towards Tuamgraney and Scariff and then follow the **Lough Derg Drive**, which skirts the lake. Joining it at Tuamgraney, you pass **Raheen Wood** on your left, where you can take a walk, and just after that you get your first wonderful view over the lake.

Killaloe

Killaloe is a delightful little town on the Shannon at the southernmost tip of Lough Derg, with the Bernagh Mountains behind it. It's the perfect destination if you're interested in water-based activities, such as fishing, cruising, boating, sailing, swimming, wind-sailing and waterskiing. Its history is also fascinating, as it was the birthplace of Brian Boru (AD 940-1014), High King of Ireland, who subdued the Vikings and whose O'Brien clan dominated this part of the country as Kings of Thomond.

The town was one of the most powerful religious and political centers in the early medieval period. **St. Flannan's Cathedral**, with its beautiful Romanesque doorway and two oratories, dates from the 13th century. It's the center of a Music Festival each year when leading classical musicians come to perform here from all over the world.

You cross a 13-arch bridge to **Ballina** on the Tipperary side of the river, which is so close that it's hard to distinguish between the two towns.

The **Killaloe Heritage Centre**, run by Shannon Heritage, explores Celtic Ireland, the arrival of Christianity and the monastic tradition, as well as the development of the Shannon River as a transport system.

THE DYSERT O'DEA TRAIL

The **Dysert O'Dea Archaeology/History Trail** includes 25 sites all within a radius of a few miles and you can buy a detailed guide at the shop, or just follow the signs. The Castle was built in 1480, and its upper floors and staircase, badly damaged by Cromwell's soldiers in 1651, have been repaired. It houses a fascinating museum and there is an audio-visual presentation. The site also includes a church, mostly dating from the 12th century, and a high cross, one of the finest in the country.

This is one of my favorite sites anywhere. It's seven miles (11 km) from Ennis and three miles (4.8 km) from Corofin, open daily, May to September, 10 am-6 pm. ☎ (065) 683-7401; at other times of the year, call to arrange a visit ☎ (065) 683-7305.

◆ Adventures

On Foot

There are three waymarked long-distance walks in Clare: the Burren Way, the Mid-Clare Way, and the East Clare Way. Of course, you can walk small sections of them if you want.

The **Burren Way** (28 miles/45 km) takes you to and from Ballyvaughan and Lahinch, with wonderful views along the way. The **Mid-Clare Way** is circular, taking you around Ennis through villages, including Quin, Ruan, Dysert O'Dea, Kilmaley, Clarecastle. It's 86 miles (138 km) long in total, and on the way you'll see castles, abbeys and small farms. The **East Clare Way** is also circular and the longest of the three at 112 miles (180 km). On it you'll discover the Slieve Bernagh and Slieve Aughty mountains, Lough Graney, rivers, wood-

lands and bogs, and many charming little villages, including Tulla, Feakle, Mountshannon, Ogonnelloe.

Further Information

Contact Ennis or any other regional tourist ffice, or go to www.walkireland.ie. Maps and guides to all the walks are available, as well as a book, *The Waymarked Trails of Ireland* by Michael Fewer.

GUIDED WALK

If you are interested in a guided walk, contact Burren Hill Walks, Corkscrew Hill, Ballyvaughan. ☎/fax (065) 707-7168; burrenhillwalks@eircom.net.

On Wheels

Co. Clare is ideal for cycling, as the roads are quiet and, away from main roads, almost free of traffic, but watch out for tractors and other agricultural machinery on the move.

Among the signposted ways is the **Burren Cycle Route**, 155 miles long (249 km), stretching from the Shannon River in the east to Loop Head, which juts out into the Atlantic in the south of the county. In the section that gives the route its name, you pass through a landscape dominated by pale gray limestone rock, interspersed with green fields, and lots of wildflowers, especially in spring and early summer. After that, you travel parallel to the Atlantic, with wonderful views.

BIKE RENTAL

One of the places where you can rent (or hire, as the Irish say) a bicycle is at **Ennis Train Station**, part of a network with depots at Dublin, Cork, Killarney, Galway, Westport and Donegal. You can rent them by the day, week or longer, and return them here or, for a small extra charge, at one of the other depots. ☎ (065) 686-8884 or, toll-free in the Republic, 1-800-298-100.

Tierneys of Ennis has been renting Raleigh bikes for decades, and will arrange accommodation for your first night. 17 Abbey Street, ☎ (065) 682-9433, www.ennisrentabike.com, enniscycles@eircom.net.

If you want to start cycling in North Clare, one place to rent from is **Burren Bike**, The Launderette, Ballyvaughan. ☎ (065) 707-7061; info@burrenbike.com.

On Water

WEST CLARE

Take a trip to Scattery Island, 15-20 minutes away by boat from Kilrush, with **Scattery Island Ferries Ltd.**, ☎ (065) 905-1327, which operates from Kilrush Creek Marina. To get the best from it, visit the Scattery Island Centre on Merchant's Quay first. Admission is free to the Centre, and it's open mid-June to mid-September daily, 10 am to 6 pm. Call to check times off-season. ☎/fax (065) 905-2139; scatteryisland@ealga.ie.

The company also runs trips to the **Shannon Estuary**, Ireland's first marine Special Area of Conservation, which is home to a group of **bottlenose dolphins**. There are three or four dolphin-watching trips a day in summer (allow at least two hours). shannondolphins@eircom.net; www.shannondolphins.ie.

Alternatively, you can head to **Carrigaholt**, a quiet and quaint old fishing port on the way to Loop Head, south of Kilrush. The village is overlooked by the ruins of a 15th-century castle and has a beautiful sandy beach.

Dolphinwatch Carrigaholt offers boat trips from here to see the dolphins, and migratory seabirds, by day and in the evenings. They have four or five trips daily from April to the end of October; other months, the schedule depends on weather. You should phone on the day after 8 am. ☎ (065) 905-8156; info@dolphinwatch.ie; www.dolphinwatch.ie.

From June until mid-September, you can also take a trip under sail on the *Anna M*, with **Saoirse Sea Sports**. It's perfect for a memorable scenic excursion, for sea angling or dolphin watching, and carries seven. ☎ (065) 905-8990; killstiffin@eircom.net; www.gannetsway.com.

EAST CLARE

During the summer, you can take a boat trip from Mountshannon, five miles (eight km) north of Scariff, to **Holy Island** and enjoy a guided tour of its monuments, including the Round Tower, Holy Well and the

Bargaining Stone, where you can renew your marriage vows. ☎ (061) 921615.

R & B Marine Services, based at the Marina at Killaoe, runs cruises on their river bus *Derg Princess*, passing the Fort of Brian Boru and into Lough Derg. Daily, May-September. ☎ (061) 375-011; fax 376205.

Or you can take a trip on *The Spirit of Killaloe*, which leaves from the Bridge daily, May-September, with a detailed commentary from a guide. It's a luxury 50-seater, with full bar and snacks available, and its upper deck is ideal for enjoying the scenery. ☎ (086) 814-0559; fax (061) 376-691; whelans@killaloe.ie; www.killaloe.ie/thespiritofkillaloe.

Williamstown Harbor, in East Clare near Whitegate on the shore of Lough Derg, is the base for the **Shannon Castle Line**. The company's been in business for more than 25 years, and has a fleet of two- to eight-berth cruisers. You pass lots of pubs, restaurants and shops as you cruise along. Don't worry if you've never tried it before – you get expert instruction before you set off. They'll arrange transfers from Shannon Airport an hour away. ☎ (061) 927-042; fax 927-426; sales@shannoncruisers.com; www.shannoncastleline.com.

Based at Killaloe is **Ireland Line Cruisers**, which has been hiring out cruisers on the Shannon and Erne Waterways for 20 years. ☎ (061) 375-011; fax 375-331; www.irelandlinecruisers.com.

If you're part of a small group, you could charter a 28-meter Dutch steel barge with crew of two from the marina at Killaloe, perfect for an angling or golfing vacation for six-12 people. The barges have roomy cabins, even central heating. Each barge has a fishing boat and dinghy; tackle and bikes are available for rent. Contact Michael Bulger, Ogonnelloe, Tuamgraney, East Clare. ☎ (061) 923-044; fax 923-056.

River Shannon at Killaloe

FISHING

With the river Shannon, 200 miles (320 km) of coastline on the Atlantic and too many rivers and lakes to count, it's not surprising that this part of Ireland is very popular with anglers.

There are three main pike-angling fisheries in Co. Clare: the River Shannon and its largest lake, Lough Derg, the river Fergus, and the East Clare lakelands. Remember that you don't need a State licence, but you are only allowed to catch one fish per day per person, maximum 6.63 lbs (3 kgs).

Good bags of bream, tench and other fish are consistently caught on the Shannon and from the lakes dotting East Clare. The Clare coastline and both shores of the Shannon Estuary offer wonderful shore angling, with easily accessible rocks and beaches.

THE SHANNON

The majestic Shannon almost divides Ireland in two and is the longest river on the island, with almost 500 miles (750 km) of recreational waters. The river stretches from Belleek in Northern Ireland to Killaloe, here in Co. Clare. On its journey to the sea it is joined by lots of smaller rivers, streams and canals, and has more than a 100 small islands and 12 lakes.

The Shannon is now the backbone of a vast network of inland waterways, joined to the Erne via the restored Shannon-Erne waterway. Pike, trout, salmon, bream, roach, rudd, tench, perch and eels can be found throughout the Shannon system.

Waterways Ireland is one of the North-South Implementation Bodies set up under the Good Friday Agreement. Its HQ is in Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh, with regional offices in Scarriff, Co. Clare, Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim, and Dublin; www.waterwaysireland.org.

INSHORE ANGLING

With 50 miles (80 km) of tidal water from Limerick City to Loop Head, the eight-mile-wide (13 km) **Shannon Estuary** is one of the best places for inshore angling.

There are two main seasons for salmon – the spring run from March to May and, for the grilse, from the end of May until September. The Doonbeg, Fergus and Shannon rivers have good runs of both.

Both the Feale and Doonbeg rivers also have a good run of sea trout from May to July, especially in the upper stretches. Many of the smaller rivers flowing into the sea off the Clare and North Kerry coasts have a small run of sea trout, and, in some, a small run of grilse.

There are wild brown trout in the rivers, including the Shannon and Fergus, and the lakes of the Shannon Region. Most noted for trout are Lough Derg, and Loughs Inchiquin, Dromore and Ballyline on the Fergus.

LICENSES & PERMITS

You must have a State licence for salmon and sea trout angling. There are two types – national and regional – and you can get them for a full season, for 21 days or for one day.

Note that you must have a permit from the ESB (Electricity Supply Board) to fish the Shannon and its tributaries. Also, day tickets may be necessary in some waters controlled by local angling clubs or the ESB, so check with local tackle shops.

Licenses, permits and day tickets are available from local tackle shops and the ESB at Ardnacrusha, Co. Clare. ☎ (061) 345588.

DEEP SEA ANGLING

Off the coasts of counties Clare and North Kerry you can land a huge variety of sea fish. Check locally or at tourist offices, as there are deep-sea charter boats available at several locations. Check out **www.shannon-fishery-board.com**, which is an excellent site with loads of information.

On Horseback

Among the places where you can enjoy a ride is **The Clare Equestrian Centre**, five minutes east of Ennis. Turn left at Clarecastle off the N18 to Limerick, then turn right when you come to Doora Church. It has indoor and outdoor arenas, a cross-country course covering 70 acres. You can also ramble on the surrounding roads. ☎ (065) 684-0136; fax 684-3607; www.clareequestrian.com, info@clareequestrian.com.

At Fanore on the coast, the **Burren Riding Centre** offers beach and hill trekking. ☎ (065) 707-6140.

◆ Golf

Among the courses to choose from in Co. Clare are those at Ennis, Kilkee, Kilrush, Doonbeg, Spanish Point and Shannon. The best known is the **Lahinch Old Course**, www.lahinchgolf.com, which has been there since 1892 looking out over the Atlantic. Across the road from it is the newer **Castle Course**, ☎ (065) 708-1003; fax 708-1592.

The **Kilkee Golf and Country Club** was founded in 1896 and has fantastic views over the Ocean and Bay, with some holes right along the cliff edge. ☎ (065) 905-6048, www.kilkeegolfclub.ie.

The **East Clare Golf Course** is at Bodyke, six miles (10 km) from Lough Derg. ☎ (061) 921322; fax 921388, www.eastclare.com, info@eastclare.com.

◆ Where to Stay

For accommodations pricing guide, see page 311.

Hotels

Gregans Castle Hotel

☆☆☆☆ The most attractive place to stay in the Burren is **Gregans Castle Hotel** on the N67, just over three miles (4.8 km) south of Ballyvaughan and seven miles (11 km) north of Lisdoonvarna. The hotel is at the bottom of a corkscrew hill that gives you amazing views of the landscape. Do take care driving down, and pull over and stop before taking a look! It's a country house hotel, owned and run by the Haden family for 30 years. Across the road is the original towerhouse dating from the 15th or 16th century, which is privately owned. A member of Ireland's Blue Book (see page 53), it has won numerous awards and recommendations. Each bedroom and suite is individual and beautifully decorated, with four-poster or half-tester beds. They also have lots of

suggestions on how to enjoy your stay, including their own booklet of walking trails. Organic Burren lamb and beef are specialties in the restaurant, along with locally caught fish from the Atlantic Ocean. Non-residents can dine here, but must reserve in advance. $$-$$$$. ☎ (065) 707-7005; fax 707-7111; res@gregans.ie; www.gregans.ie.

☆☆☆☆☆ **Dromoland Castle Hotel**, near Newmarket-on-Fergus, is one of the most luxurious and unusual hotels in the country, set in wonderful grounds, covering nearly 400 acres, which includes ancient woodlands. Its golf course is considered one of the best in the country, and guests also have a huge choice of other leisure activities. On the estate you can play tennis, fish, shoot, go boating, or just wander around the beautiful gardens or woods. If you're feeling energetic, you can jog or cycle around the grounds. Guestrooms are beautifully furnished. There's a choice of restaurants, with the **Earl of Thomond** in the Castle, and **The Fig Tree** in the Golf and Country Club. $$$$. ☎ (061) 368-144; fax 363-355; sales@dromoland.ie; www.dromoland.ie.

☆☆☆☆ For years and years, **Moy House** looked sad and almost derelict. Now it's been sensitively restored and transformed into a four-star guesthouse. It's about a mile south of Lahinch, and overlooks the sea from a height. The River Moy wanders though its 15 acres of grounds – an old estate with mature woodlands. There are only nine very spacious bedrooms, some with freestanding original baths, and the feeling is that of staying in a private home. Dinner is available as well as breakfast. It belongs to Ireland's Blue Book (see page 53). $$-$$$, with special offers November-May. ☎ toll-free from USA 800-323-5463; (065) 708-2800; fax 708-2500; moyhouse@eircom.net; www.moyhouse.com.

☆☆☆ **Auburn Lodge Hotel** on the Galway Road is on the outskirts of Ennis, surrounded by gardens. Carvery serves food all day, also Oyster Restaurant, and traditional music in bar often. Rate from $$ with special offers available. ☎ (065) 682-1247 www.irishcourthotels.com.

☆☆☆ What's most enticing about the **Bellbridge House Hotel** at Spanish Point is its location, almost looking down on the beach. It's a modern building, the staff are friendly, and the bedrooms comfortable. There's a pleasant bar serving food all day, and dinner is served at **The Tides Bistro**, which uses local produce, including fish. It's a pleasant place to stay for a quiet break or to tour the county. They of-

fer packages, including mid-week specials and golf breaks. $$ in summer; $ low season. ☎ (065) 708-4038; fax 708-4830; www.bellbridgehotelclare.com, info@.bellbridgehotelclare.com.

☆☆☆ If it's fishing that attracts you to Clare, then the **Magowna House Hotel** at Inch, Kilmaley, couldn't be more ideal. It's equipped with all the facilities to make your trip comfortable and pleasurable, including a tackle shed, drying room, with boat rental and ghillies (guides) available. It's on the River Fergus, just 10 minutes from Ennis on the R474, and is on the Mid-Clare waymarked walking route. The hotel has a comfortable bar looking out on Mount Callan, where you can meet locals, and there's an open fire when it's cold. There's a choice of a table d'hôte or à la carte menu in **Bennett's Restaurant**, using carefully prepared locally sourced fresh ingredients. Rates per room, which sleep three, start at $, with even better value breaks available. ☎ (065) 683-9009; fax 683-9258; info@magowna.com; www.magowna.com.

☆☆☆ **Old Ground Hotel**, Ennis, is a personal favorite. It was an 18th-century manor house, and it combines old-fashioned style with modern facilities. The helpful staff are always cheerful. There's a choice of guestrooms, including suites. The hotel is popular with locals (always a good sign) who meet in the wood-lined **Poets' Corner bar** (it has its own entrance on O'Connell Street), and dine in its restaurants. In the bar you can relax, surrounded by old theater programs and other memorabilia. Food is served all day and there's traditional music on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday nights. There are two restaurants – the **Town Hall Café** serves Irish and European dishes all day, and has an à la carte evening menu; and the **O'Brien Room** is well-known for its traditional and innovative dishes, using local produce. From $$ with special offers; check online. ☎ (065) 682-8127; fax 682-8112; reservations@oldgroundhotel.ie; www.flynnhotels.com.

The advantage of staying at the **Kincora Hall Hotel** in Killaloe, in East Clare, is that it's actually on Lough Derg and has its own marina. Angling, boating, sailing, watersports, hill walking and bicycle rental are all available at the hotel, with lots of other activities nearby. Its bistro and bar serve wholesome food all day, with dinner nightly in the **Marina Restaurant**, where fresh local fish is one of its specialties. $$. ☎ (061) 376-000; fax 376-665; www.kincorahall.com.

Unusual Places to Stay

☆☆☆☆ **Nature Quest**, also in Kilkee, is dedicated to raising awareness and understanding of the local environment. Accommodation is in three cottages with kitchens where you can cook for yourself; there's an indoor heated pool and game room, and guests are encouraged to go on self-guided walks, or bird-watching and wildlife tours, led by experts. ☎ (065) 905-6789; www.naturequest.ie.

☆☆☆ **The Kilkee Thalassotherapy Centre** is a guest house where you can have seaweed baths and body wraps, marine facials, massages and other treatments. ☎ (065) 905-6742; info@kilkeethalasso.com; www.kilkeethalasso.com.

Hostels

The following hostels are open all year:

Lahinch Hostel, ☎ (065) 708-1040; www.visitlahinch.com

Flanagan's, in Doolin, ☎ (065) 707-4564

Rainbow, also in Doolin, ☎ (065) 707-4415; www.rainbowhostel@eircom.net

Loughnane's, in Feakle, ☎ (061) 954-200; eastclarehostels@eircom.net

Paddy's Doolin Hostel, ☎ (065) 707-4006; doolinhostel@iol.ie www.kingsway.ie/doolinhostel.

Check out others, all open in summer and some longer, by contacting the **IHH Independent Holiday Hostels of Ireland**. ☎ (01) 836-4700; fax 836-4710; info@hostels-ireland.com; www.hostels-ireland.com.

Rental Cottages

Quilty Holiday Cottages, overlooking the Atlantic near Spanish Point, have great facilities, inclusing an indoor heated pool, sauna and mini-gym. ☎ (065) 708-7095; fax 708-7388; quilty@iol.ie; www.quiltycottages.com. The owners also have cottages to rent at **Westpark Holiday Homes**, Spanish Point.

At **Ballyvaughan** there are thatched cottages traditionally furnished with open turf fires and electric storage heaters. They sleep six, and

are available for weekends, as well as by the week. ☎ (061) 411-109; info@rentacottage.ie; www.rentacottage.ie.

***Rent a Cottage** also has groups of houses in other locations around Co. Clare and the country, including one overlooking Lough Inchiquin near Corofin and the other in Corofin itself, which is a traditional angling center.*

RV Parks & Camping

There are a number of caravan and camping parks in Co. Clare. Take a look at **www.camping-ireland.ie**. Among them are the following.

☆☆☆ **Nagles** is a caravan park at Doolin, on the edge of the Atlantic only a few yards from the pier. Open April to end September. ☎ (065) 707-4458; fax 707-4936; ken@doolincamping.com.

☆☆☆ Also at Doolin is **O'Connors Riverside Camping and Caravan Park**, which is on the family farm, also a Bed and Breakfast. It's open May to end Sept. ☎ (065) 707-4314; fax 707-4498; joan@oconnorsdoolin.com.

☆☆ **The Green Acres Park** is signposted off the N67 road from Kilrush to the seaside resort of Kilkee, just five minutes outside the latter. It's on the shore of the River Shannon in a secluded setting. Breakfast is available on site. Open early April to end September. ☎/fax (065) 905-7011.

☆☆☆ **Corofin Village Park** is on the main street of Corofin, a popular spot with anglers, and is also open April to end September. The owners can provide maps and advice on walking and cycling routes, and about fishing on seven nearby lakes. ☎ (065) 638-7683; fax 683-7239; corohost@iol.ie; www.claretohere.com/camping.

In East Clare there's a choice of parks – Lough Derg at Killaloe and Lakeside at Mountshannon – both offering plenty of opportunities for watersports, fishing and other activities.

The **Lough Derg Holiday Park** has a shop, restaurant, take-away, games room, and visitors can fish from its well-sheltered setting on the shore of the lake. It also has fully equipped vacation cottages to rent , each of which comes with a boat. At its Activity Center, you can learn windsurfing and sailing, or you can go pony trekking or rent

mountain bikes. Open late May to early September ☎ (061) 376-777; fax 620-700; info@loughderg.net; www.loughderg.net.

The **Lakeside Holiday Park** is also on the shore of Lough Derg. Watersports facilities include motor and rowing boats and kayaks for rent, as well as swimming and fishing, and there's a tennis court and pitch-and-putt. It has a café/bistro, and bikes are available to rent. Open May 1 to October 1. ☎ (061) 927-225; fax 927-336; lakesidecamping@eircom.net; www.lakesideireland.com.

◆ Where to Eat

Ennis boasts a huge range of eating places, from fast food to upmarket, as well as lots of pubs, many of them retaining their original features, which serve lunches and snacks. In some you can enjoy traditional music as you eat, especially on weekends and during the summer.

Around the county, many restaurants belong to the **Clare Good Food Circle**. Check them out on www.meetlimerickshannon.com.

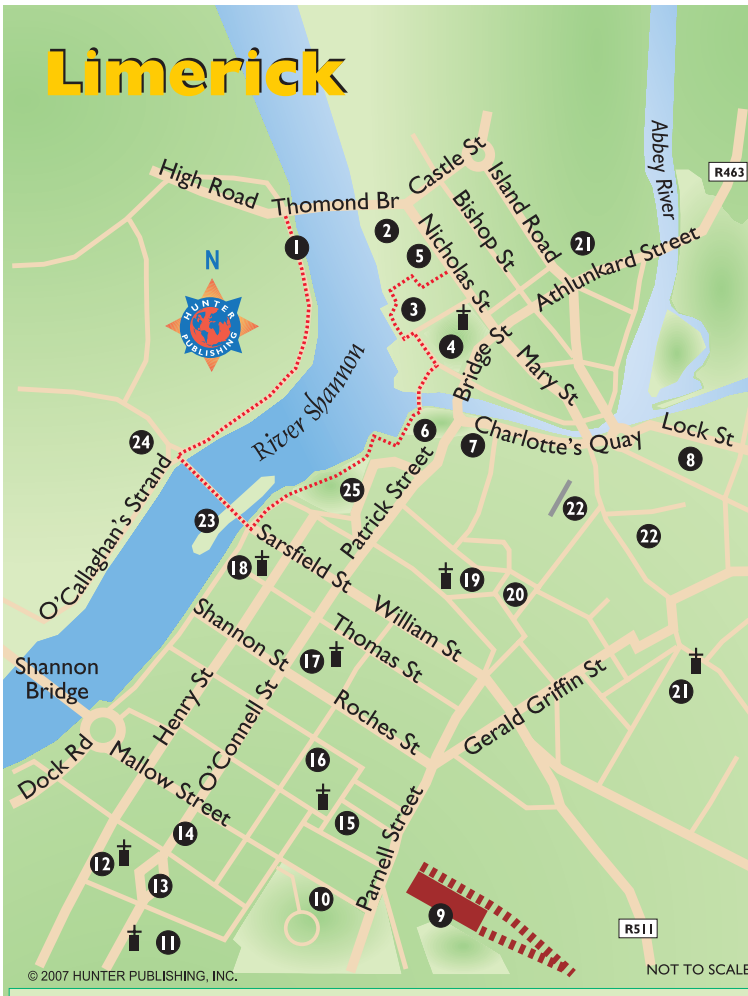
The Dolmen Restaurant, The Square, Lisdoonvarna, is open all year from early morning to late evening, with a great choice of food at reasonable prices. ☎ (065) 707-4944.

Kelly's Bar & Restaurant, Henry Street, Kilrush has food available all day in the bar, and its restaurant is open from 6.30pm with local seafood a speciality. ☎ (065) 905-1811.

O'Looneys Pub in Lahinch has a full bar menu every day and music every night in summer, some nights in winter. ☎ (065) 708-1414.

County Limerick

County Limerick does not have any spectacular scenery. What it does have is a gentle rural charm, with a variety of landscape from the wide Shannon Estuary on its northwest coast, to the peaks of the Galtee Mountains in the southeast. Co. Kerry is to the west, and Tipperary to the east. Most of Limerick's central area is a fertile limestone plain known as the Golden Vale. The county is a small one, roughly rectangular in shape and about 40 miles (64 km) wide and 30 miles (48 km) from north to south, so it's easy to explore. It's a lovely area for walking, fishing, cycling, playing golf, or just relaxing in attractive surroundings.



1. Treaty Stone
2. King John's Castle
3. City Hall
4. St. Mary's Cathedral
5. Limerick Museum
6. Hunt Museum; Custom House;
7. The Granary
8. Kilree Lodge
9. Bus & Railroad Stations; Priory Park
10. Art Gallery; People's Park
11. St. Joseph's Church
12. Jesuit Church
13. The Crescent; O'Connell Monument
14. Belltable Arts Centre
15. Glenworth Hotel; Dominican Church
16. Theatre Royal
17. Augustinian Church
18. Franciscan Church
19. St. Michael's Church
20. Milk Market
21. St. John's Cathedral
22. Old City Wall
23. Shannon Rowing Club Museum
24. Jury's Hotel
25. Arthur's Quay & Park

Walking Tour

Leaving Limerick City on the N18 towards Ennis and Galway, you are immediately in County Clare, as almost all the county lies to the south of the River Shannon on which the city stands.

◆ Getting Here & Getting Around

The main roads radiating out from Limerick City are the N7 to Dublin; the N24 through Pallasgreen to Tipperary; and the N69, which runs parallel to the Shannon Estuary through Askeaton, Foynes, Glin, and on into Tarbert in Co. Kerry. The N20 links Limerick with Cork, and branching off it after Patrickswell is the N21, which takes you through Adare, Rathkeale, Newcastle West and on into Co. Kerry at Abbeyfeale.

◆ Tourist Information

Limerick Tourist Information Centre, Arthur's Quay, ☎ (061) 317-522; touristofficelimerick@shannon-dev.ie
Shannon Region, www.shannonregiontourism.ie
Shannon Development, www.shannon-dev.ie

Shannon Airport, www.shannonairport.com

Ballyhoura Country, www.ballyhouracountry.com

Limerick Visitor Information, www.visitlimerick.com

Adare Tourist Information Centre is open February-December. ☎ (061) 396-255; fax 396-610; touristofficeadare@shannon-dev.ie.

There are also Tourist Information points at the following:

- **Civic Trust House**, The Square, Askeaton
- **Kingfisher Angling Club**, Castleconnell. ☎ (061) 377-407
- **Foynes Flying Boat Museum**, ☎/fax (069) 65416; www.flyingboatmuseum.com
- **Ballyhoura Failte**, Kilfinane. ☎ (063) 91300

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

Limerick Archives & Ancestory, www.irishroots.net, unfortunately is suspended at the time of writing due to lack of funds.

◆ Sightseeing

Limerick City

Treaty Stone, Limerick

Founded in 922 by the Danes, who sailed up the Shannon Estuary and built a settlement on an island here, Limerick is the Republic's third-largest city, after Dublin and Cork. It became the seat of the O'Briens, Kings of Thomond and Munster, under Brian Boru. The Normans, arriving in 1194, established two walled towns, Englishtown and Irishtown, and granted Limerick its royal charter as a city – which makes its charter older than London's. And Limerick's central location makes it a great base for exploring the neighboring counties of Clare, Kerry, Cork and Tipperary.

The Earls of Desmond, known as the Geraldines, were at the center of Norman power in the province of Munster, and led a revolt against the English in 1571, which was defeated and cost them their lands. That was only the beginning, as Limerick was the center of rebellions and wars for centuries. Among them was the year-long siege of the city by Cromwell in 1651. The Jacobites, led by Sir Patrick Sarsfield, besieged the city from 1690 until the signing of the Treaty of Limerick in 1691. The **Treaty Stone** on which it was signed, according to tradition, can be seen on a granite pedestal.

As the city expanded in the 18th century most of its walls were removed. In the 19th century, Limerick was an important port for freight and passenger boats departing for Canada and America.

In the first half of the 20th century it was a city in decline.This is the period documented by Frank McCourt in his Pulitzer-Prize-winning memoir, *Angela's Ashes*. Circumstances began to change dramatically when Shannon Airport was established in the 1950s just 10 miles (16 km) away in Co. Clare. Not only did the airport bring large numbers of tourists, from North America in particular; it also brought industrial development.

It was at Shannon that the practice of offering duty-free purchases to international travelers was first introduced.

ON FOOT

The area of Limerick called **King's Island** is where the Vikings (or Danes) set up their first colony. The center of Viking administration, called the **Thingmote**, is believed to have been where **St. Mary's Cathedral** now stands. It's one of the most important buildings in Limerick and is still in use, as it has been for over 850 years. There's a guide booklet available and tours can be booked in advance (access may be restricted during services). Open daily year-round, 9 am-1 pm; open to 5 pm from June to September, or by arrangement. ☎ (061) 310-293; fax 315-721.

Next to the Cathedral on Nicholas Street are **columns**, part of the 17th-century **Exchange**, which was the city's administrative center.

The **Bishop's Palace**, opposite the castle, was built in the 1660s in Palladian style, and is now the base for the Limerick Civic Trust. Open all year, Monday-Friday. Check times. ☎ (061) 313-399; fax 315-513.

A VERY SPECIAL COLLECTION

The **Hunt Museum** is in the city center, just down the street from the Tourist Information Centre on Arthur's Quay. The museum is in the restored Custom House and has a display on three floors of more than 2,000 artifacts.

Visitors can take a tour or walk around on their own. There's also a visiting exhibition gallery, a shop, and a lovely restaurant looking out over the river. Open daily all year, 10 am to 5 pm; Sundays, 2-5 pm. ☎ (061) 312-833; fax 312-834; info@huntmuseum.com; www.ul.ie/~hunt.

Custom House, Limerick

King John's Castle was built around 1200 on the orders of the English monarch. There's a lot to see today, including underground excavations, the reconstructed courtyard, and a modern center with exhibitions about the castle and city; allow an hour or more. Maps and brochures are available for self-guided tours. A royal mint was established on the site, and today visitors can strike a replica of an original coin as a souvenir, which is fun. There's a café/restaurant and a good crafts shop. Open daily all year. Open daily year-round: May to October, 9:30 am to 5:30pm; March and April to 5pm; rest of year 10am-4:30pm. ☎ (061) 360-788; fax 361-020; www.shannonheritage.com. Beside the castle is the **Limerick City Museum**, open all year, Tuesday-Saturday, 10 am to 1 pm and 2:15 to 7 pm. ☎ (061) 417-826; www.limerickcity.ie.

A LAZY WAY TO EXPLORE

During the summer, there are tours of the city by horse-drawn carriage, starting at the Tourist Information Centre. ☎ (061) 317-522 for details.

WALKING TOURS

The ***Angela's Ashes*** **Walking Tour** takes in locations from the book by Frank McCourt. Details are available from St. Mary's Action Group. ☎/fax (061) 318-106.

There's also a **Historical Walking Tour** of the city, which you can ask about at the Tourist Information Centre.

Spectator Sports

Ask anyone which sport is associated with Limerick and you'll be told – **rugby**. It's everyone's game; its supporters come from all backgrounds and travel to support their teams. No one will ever forget October 1978 when at Thomond Park, home of Rugby in the city, Munster defeated the All-Blacks of New Zealand 12-0. **GAA** (Gaelic Athletic Association) games are played at the Gaelic Grounds, Ennis Road, and **soccer** is played on local grounds all over the city. If you can, try to watch a match during your visit.

Limerick Race Course for horseracing is just south of the city, off the N20 to Cork. Facilities include bars and restaurants. There are day and evening races throughout the year. ☎ (061) 320-000; fax 355-766; info@limerick-racecourse.com; www.limerick-racecourse.com. There's **grey-**

hound racing at The Markets Field on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays. Check locally for details. ☎ (061) 415-170.

◆ Entertainment

Belltable Arts Centre on O'Connell Street hosts exhibitions, plays, and other artistic events. Call and find out what's on in the Centre and around the city. It has a nice little café too.

There's ten-pin bowling at **Funworld** in the Crescent Shopping Centre, Dooradoyle, ☎ (061) 301-033; and at **Savoy Bowl** on Henry Street, ☎ (061) 419-305.

There are two multi-screen cinemas: the Omniplex at the Crescent Shopping Centre, ☎ (061) 305-007; and the Storm Cinema, Castletroy, ☎ (061) 330-036. Of course, music is played in many of the pubs.

◆ Touring On Wheels

There are four signposted routes in the county suitable for both cyclists and drivers: the N69; the West Limerick Drive; the Golden Vale Drive; and the Slí Finn drive.

The N69 Drive

This route, west from the City to Tarbert, Co. Kerry, is a meandering drive along the shore of the Shannon to Glin. It's 35 miles (57 km) long, and a pleasant way of traveling into Co. Kerry or, via car ferry at Tarbert, to cross the estuary into Co. Clare.

The **Foynes Flying Boat Museum** celebrates the beginning of Transatlantic flights in 1939-45, when seaplanes bringing passengers from North America used the sheltered strait between the town and Foynes Island. Open daily, March 31-October 31. ☎/fax (069) 65416; www.flyingboatmuseum.com.

Foynes is also where Irish or Gaelic coffee was invented by a barman to warm up those weary passengers, and it's celebrated with an annual festival here each July.

West Limerick Drive

The West Limerick Drive, 76 miles (123 km) long, starts at the very picturesque village of **Adare** on the N21, and then leaves the main road after Rathkeale, taking you on a circular route.

Adare Village

Adare has a wide main street lined with thatched cottages, built in 1826, some housing craft shops, others restaurants. One is a gallery. Do make the effort to spend at least an hour or two wandering around.

On Main Street is the **Adare Heritage Centre**, open daily from 9 am year-round, closing at 6 pm in summer, 5 pm the rest of year. ☎ (061) 396-255; fax 396-610; adareheritage@eircom.net.

The Golden Vale Drive

The Golden Vale Drive, 69 miles (112 km) long, begins just southeast of Limerick City on the N24 toward Ballyneety and Lough Gur. Continue through Bruff, Athlacca, delightful Kilmallock, Kilfinane, Ballylanders, Galbally, and then through Emly and Pallasgreen to loop back onto the N24.

LOUGH GUR

Lough Gur is a small lake, surrounded by limestone hills. It's also one of the most important **archaeological sites** in the country, with the remains of stone circles and standing stones, burial chambers and cairns, dating back 5,000 years to the time of Neolithic or Stone Age settlement.

Many of the monuments are on private land; you must respect that and close the gates. The **Lough Gur Stone Age Centre** is open May-September, daily 10 am to 6 pm (phone ahead, as opening times change). ☎ (061) 360-788.

Slí Finn

The *Slí Finn* route is the shortest at 18 miles (30 km); it's a loop off the Golden Vale Drive. You can join it at Kilfinane or near Ballylanders.

KILMALLOCK

Kilmallock is now a quiet little town, but was once very important; it guards the passes between the Galtee and Ballyhoura Mountains. It

was the chief town of the Earls of Desmond and was very prosperous from 1250 to 1580, but when they lost their rebellion against the English it declined. It's one of only six towns in Ireland that still retains long stretches of its medieval wall. It's worth stopping here to explore.

Drop into **Friars' Gate Theatre and Arts Centre** to see the current exhibition and check out what evening entertainment is available. Then follow the self-guided trail, starting at the little Museum, which is nearby in a 19th-century cottage.

BRUREE

This village is worth at least a short visit. It is just off the N20 (the Limerick-Cork road), in the valley of the **River Maigue**. The village is picturesque, with an old corn mill on a rocky ledge above a waterfall, as well as the remains of a Norman castle, a church built in 1812 and an ancient holy well dedicated to St. Munchin.

Bruree is where **Eamon de Valera** (1882-1975), who dominated the political stage for decades, was raised. He was *Taoiseach* (Prime Minister) for 21 years and President from 1959 to 1973. The **de Valera Museum and Bruree Heritage Centre** is in the old school that he attended. Open year-round: Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm; Saturday and Sunday, 2-5 pm.

Bus Tours

Barratt Scenic Tours runs daytrips by minibus to locations in counties Limerick, Clare, Galway and Cork. Book in advance. ☎ (061) 384-700; www.4tours.biz, info@4tours.biz.

Bus Éireann also runs daytrips by bus – call the Limerick Bus Station. ☎ (061) 313-333; www.buseireann.ie.

◆ Adventures

On Foot

WAYMARKED WAYS

The 16-mile (26-km) **Lough Derg Way** takes you out along the River Shannon from Limerick City to Killaloe, on the Clare and Tipperary border, and then uphill to where you overlook Lough Derg, then on into Dromineer.

The **Ballyhoura Way** follows the route taken by the Irish Chieftain O'Sullivan Beare, between December 1602 and January 1603, all the way from Castletownbere in Co. Cork to Co. Leitrim, through the middle of Co. Limerick.

Every kind of walker will find a trail to follow from 22 locations in **Ballyhoura Country**; at each of them there's a map board. You can pick up maps at the Tourist Information Point in Kilfinane, and guided walks are also available. ☎ (063) 91300; info@ballyhoura.org.

BALLYHOURA COUNTRY

This is part of the region marketed as Ballyhoura Country, which extends into the neighboring areas of North Cork and Tipperary. Among the activities promoted is walking, with over 93 miles (150 km) of waymarked ways through mountains and valleys, varying in length from a short stroll to long distance. Check out their Web site at www.ballyhoura-country.com.

The **Slieve Felim Way** in East Limerick is 18 miles (29 km) long and starts a mile and a half east of Murroe, taking walkers to Silvermines in neighboring Co. Tipperary.

There's a choice of walks in West Limerick. The **Aughinish Nature Trail** starts at Loop Head Road, Askeaton, on the N69. There are three self-guided routes. Maps are available from the Visitor Centre at Aughinish Alumina. Open daily, year-round. ☎ (061) 604-000.

There are lovely views from **Knockfierna Hill** near Ballingarry and its walkways take in the remains of a famine village, a hill fort and a megalithic grave.

CURRAGHCHASE FOREST PARK

On the N69 at Kilcornan in West Limerick is the Curraghchase Forest Park, which covers 600 acres, with a lake, an arboretum, a nature trail and walkways, as well as the ruins of the 18th-century house of the de Vere family. Run by *Coillte*, the State forestry body. Open daily all year. Admission charges during July and August and on weekends from March-November. It's also a caravan and camping park. ☎ (061) 396-349.

*The **Celtic Theme Park and Gardens** is also at Kilcornan. It has a dolmen, ring fort, and stone circle, along with pleasant gardens. ☎/fax (061) 394-243.*

On Wheels

The **Clare Glens Cycle** is a 30-mile circular bike trail starting and ending at the Tourist Information Centre in Arthur's Quay, Limerick. The trail takes you east of the city and into the Slieve Felim Mountains.

On Water

At Foynes there's a **Yacht Club** with a marina, and there are classes in watersports. ☎ (069) 65261.

Although many of the courses at the **Kilfinane Outdoor Education Centre** are for groups, they do offer canoeing and kayaking for individuals. ☎ (063) 91161; fax 91201; kilfinedctr@eircom.net.

FISHING

For full details and a map, contact **Shannon Regional Fisheries Board**. ☎ (061) 300-238; fax 300-308; www.shannon-fishery-board.com. Their Web site is wonderful, with lots of information, including places to stay.

USEFUL CONTACTS

Castleconnell Salmon Fishery: call the **ESB Conservation Section**, Ardnacrusha, ☎ (061) 345-588, or the **Kingfisher Angling Centre**, ☎ (061) 377-407.

The Mulcair river: **Millbank House and Angling Centre**, Murroe, ☎ (061) 386-115

Ballyhoura area: the **Ballyhoura Centre** in Kilfinane, ☎ (063) 91300; info@ballyhoura.org

Abbeyfeale Anglers Association, Ryan's Shoe & Tackle Shop, New Street, Abbeyfeale, ☎ (068) 31411

Brosna/Mountcollins Angling Club, ☎ (068) 44281

Glasha Lake Trout Fishing Centre near Athea, ☎ (068) 42295

On Horseback

Fitzgeralds Equestrian Centre, Abbeyfeale, also offers accommodation on a bed-and-breakfast basis, ☎ (068) 31217; fax 31558; www.fitzgeraldsfarmhouse.com.

Limerick Equestrian Centre, Coonagh near the city, ☎ (061) 324-794

Clarina Riding Centre, near the city, ☎ (061) 353-087

Adare Equestrian Centre, Kildimo, ☎ (061) 396-373

Clonshire Equestrian Centre, Adare, ☎ (061) 396-770

Shannon View Equestrian Centre, between Glin and Tarbert, ☎ (068) 36185

Hillcrest Riding Centre, Galbally, ☎ (062) 37915

Woodview, near Newcastlewest, ☎ (069) 61554

◆ Golf

Abbeyfeale Golf Club, nine-hole course and driving range, ☎ (068) 32033

Rathbane Golf Club, a mile from the city center off the R512 to Lough Gur, is open to visitors all year. ☎/fax (061) 313-655; info@rathbane.com; www.rathbanegolf.com.

Limerick County Golf and Country Club, Ballyneety, ☎ (061) 351-881; fax 351-384; lcgolf@iol.ie; www.limerickcounty.com.

The **Newcastle West Golf Club**, Rathgoonan, Ardagh, open all year, but always phone ahead to avoid restricted times. ☎ (069) 76500; fax 76511; nswgolf@eircom.net.

◆ Where to Stay

For accommodations pricing guide, see page 311.

Hotels

☆☆☆☆ **Castle Oaks House Hotel** is in picturesque Castleconnell, 10 minutes from city. A former Georgian mansion, surrounded by 26 acres, on banks of the Shannon, has a leisure centre with pool and gym. Choice of dining in the **Acorn Restaurant** or **Coolbawn Bistro Bar**. Also self-

catering option in the **Riverside Mews**. Excellent value, rates from $$. ☎ (061) 377-666; info@castleoaks.ie, www.castleoaks.ie.

☆☆☆ **Jurys Inn**, in the city on the banks of the Shannon. Rooms sleep three adults or two adults and two children. Room rate $$. ☎ (061) 207-000; fax 400-966; www.jurysdoyle.com.

Travelodge, on the edge of the city on the NI8 road to Ennis, also offers a per-room rate for up to four people (two adults and two children or three adults and a child). Rates from $$. ☎ (061) 457-000; fax 454-991; www.travelodge.ie. Note that best prices are online.

Guesthouses

There is a variety of listings at either www.townandcountry.ie or www.irishfarmholidays.com

Deebert House, Kilmallock, Georgian home with lovely gardens, belongs to the Town and Country Homes Association, from $ for two, including breakfast. Self-catering apartments also. ☎ (063) 98106; fax 82002; info@deeberthouse.com www.deeberthouse.com

Knights Haven, a mile from Glin, belongs to the Irish Farm Holidays Association; check the site above for information. It's a working farm with pets, and has landscaped gardens overlooking the Shannon Estuary. From $ for two, including breakfast.

Rental Cottages & Hostels

☆☆☆☆ **Ballyhoura Forest Homes**, Ballyorgan, Kilfinane, off the Slí Finn driving/cycling route, a group of timber-clad houses in wooded countryside; ☎ (01) 668-3534, fax 660-6465; www.thh.ie, reservations@thh.ie.

Two members of Independent Hostels of Ireland, www.hostels-ireland.com, are:

Courtbrack Accommodation, Dock Road, Limerick, June-Sept only, ☎ (061) 302-500; 302-539; info@summerwest.com, manager.summerville@mic.ul.ie www.summerwest.com.

Trainor's Hostel, Ballingarry, open mid-March to the end of September. ☎ (069)/fax 68164; trainorhostel@eircom.net.

Camping & RV Parks

☆☆☆ **Adare Camping & Caravan Park**, open March 12 to September 30; ☎ (061) 395-376; fax 395-377; www.adarecamping.com.

Curragh Chase Caravan & Camping Park at Kilcornan, ☎ (061) 396-349.

◆ Where to Eat

There's a huge choice of places to eat in Limerick, including pubs, hotels, restaurants and coffee shops. Worth mentioning are the following.

The Green Onion Café, Old Town Hall, Rutland Street, is open Monday-Saturday, from noon to 11 pm. It serves modern Irish and vegetarian food in a relaxed setting. ☎ (061) 400-710.

Bella Italia, 43 Thomas Street, is family-run and popular, always a recommendation. Portions are generous and very good value. ☎ (061) 418-872.

St. Nicholas' Anglican Church, Galway, the largest medieval church in Ireland (© Gerry Lynch)

1. Connemara
2. Aughnanure Castle; Glengowle Silver & Lead Mine; Kylemore Abbey
3. Clifden Station House; Clifden Castle
4. Connemara National Park
5. Dunguaire Castle
6. Coole Park; Thoor Ballylee; Kiltartan Museum
7. Portumna Castle & Forest Park
8. Athenry Castle
9. Pallas Castle, Tynagh
10. Croagh Patrick; Westport House
11. Moyne Abbey; Rosserk Friary
12. Mullet Peninsula, Islands of Iniskea
13. Céide Fields
14. Mayo Abbey; Museum of Country Life
15. Ballintubber Abbey
16. Quiet Man Museum
17. Achill Island
18. Roscommon Castle & Abbey; County Museum
19. King House; Frybrook House
20. Lough Key & Forest Park; Castle Island
21. Cruathan Aí Visitor Centre

Ireland West

Three counties – **Galway**, **Mayo** and **Roscommon** – make up this region. Both Galway and Mayo have long and indented coastlines, while Roscommon is an inland county, mostly flat and dotted by lakes, with some low hills. The region is crisscrossed by rivers and streams, and there are three major lakes – Loughs Conn, Mask and Corrib. Among the activities you can engage in here are walking, fishing, and riding. There are also plenty of interesting places to visit, from ancient ruins to historic houses. See www.irelandwest.ie.

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County Galway

Galway is the second largest county in the country (after Cork) and is divided in two by Lough Corrib. Between it and the Atlantic is the wild and beautiful Connemara. To the east is a fertile limestone plain stretching to the border with Roscommon and the River Shannon. Offshore are the fascinating **Aran Islands**, where a traditional way of life, with a distinct culture and language, continues.

Galway Bay

Galway City is the county capital; other main towns include **Ballinasloe**, **Loughrea**, **Tuam** and **Clifden**.

◆ Getting Here

By Air

Galway Airport is at Carnmore, west of the city. ☎ (091) 755-569, www.galwayairport.com.

Aer Arann (www.aerarann.com) has daily flights to/from Dublin and Luton near London, as well as between here and Edinburgh and Manchester.

By Road

Galway City is served by N18-N6-N4 from Dublin (136 miles/219 km); N18-N6-N55-N54-N2-A3-M1 from Belfast (190 miles/305 km); N18-N20 from Cork (120 miles/193 km) via Ennis and Limerick; and the N17 from Sligo (86 miles/138 km).

Useful Numbers

- **Galway Bus Station**, ☎ (091) 562-000
- **Galway Train Station**, ☎ (091) 562-730

Both are in Eyre Square in the city center.

◆ Tourist Information

Galway Tourist Office, Forster Street, Eyre Square, open all year, ☎ (091) 537-700; fax 537-733; info@irelandwest.ie www.irelandwest.ie.

Other Fáilte Ireland offices:

Aran, all year, ☎ (099) 61263

Ballinasloe, seasonal, ☎ (090) 974-2604

Clifden, seasonal ☎ (095) 21163

Oranmore, all year, ☎ (091) 790-811

Oughterard, all year, ☎ (091) 552-808; fax 552-811

Salthill, seasonal, ☎ (091) 520-500

Thoor Ballylee, Gort, seasonal, ☎ (091) 631-436

Tuam, seasonal, ☎ (093) 25486/24463

Connemara Tourism is a voluntary organization, which markets that area of Co. Galway worldwide. Connemara Tourism, The Square, Clifden, ☎/fax (095) 22622; info@connemara-tourism.org; www.connemara-tourism.org.

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

There are two family-research centers serving the county: **West Galway Family History Society**, St Joseph's Community Centre, Ashe Road, Shantalla, Galway, ☎ (091) 860-464; galwayfhswest@eircom.net. The **East Galway Family History Society**, Woodford, Loughrea, Co. Galway. ☎ (090) 974-9309; fax 974-9546; www.irish-roots.net, galwayroots@eircom.net.

◆ Sightseeing

Galway City

Situated on **Galway Bay** at the mouth of the River Corrib, this is the fastest growing city in Europe, but don't be put off by its sprawling suburbs, as it retains much of its historic charm. Its streets still have their medieval layout, and the center is very compact, and easy to explore.

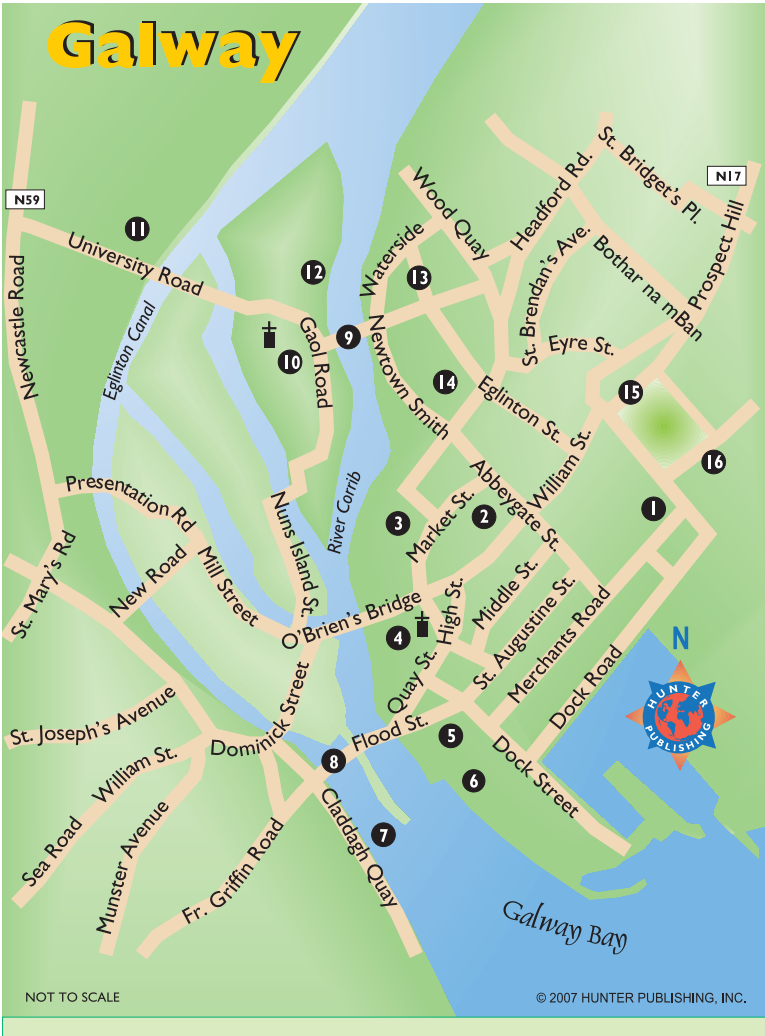
River Corrib & Cathedral

An easy way to see the city is to take an open-top bus tour from Eyre Square with **O'Neachtain Tours and City Sightseeing**. ☎ (091) 553-188; fax 553-302; naugtour@iol.ie. They also run half- and full-day tours of Connemara and farther afield.

Galway has been commercially important since the 11th century when it was a center for trade with Spain and Portugal. Today it's lively, with loads of things to do, and is so popular that it can get very crowded in summer, especially during its annual Racing Festival at **Ballybrit Racecourse**.

THE FIRST LYNCHING

Lynch's Castle, on the corner of Shop Street and Upper Abbeygate Street, is now a bank, but was a 15th-century mansion belonging to one of the powerful families or "Tribes of Galway." In the 1480s, Mayor Lynch hanged his own son for murder, and the people were so shocked that the term "lynch" was born. In the bank lobby there's an account of the trial and sentence.



1. Medieval City Wall
2. Lynch's Castle
3. Nora Barnacle Museum
4. Kirwan's Lane; St. Nicholas Church
5. Spanish Parade
6. Spanish Arch; Galway City Museum
7. The Claddagh
8. Wolfetone Bridge
9. Salmon Weir Bridge
10. Galway Cathedral
11. University College Galway
12. Fisheries
13. Town Hall; Courthouse
14. Franciscan Abbey
15. Eyre Square; Kennedy Park
16. Ceannt Station

The annual **Arts Festival** also attracts thousands, especially for its street parade, organized by the multi-award winning production company, Macnas (www.macnas.com). Its famous **Druid Theatre** produces and stages plays and has toured internationally, winning awards, including Tonys on Broadway.

Spanish Arches, Galway

There's lots of memorabilia associated with **James Joyce** at 8 Bowling Green, former home of Nora Barnacle, his partner. The house has erratic opening times and no phone, so just go there.

For a self-guided tour, start at **Eyre Square**. Walk down Williamsgate and into the main thoroughfare, **William Street**, which becomes Shop, High and then Quay streets. Turn left along the promenade to the **Spanish Arches**, where wine, brandy, spices, salt, animal produce and fish were unloaded from ships in centuries past and you'll come to the **Galway City Museum**. Allow enough time to take a look inside. After that, double back until just past William O'Brien Bridge and you can follow the walkway along the River Corrib to Salmon Weir Bridge. Cross it and visit **Galway Cathedral**, then continue up University Road and visit the **university** and its **gallery**.

PUBS

Galway's pubs are lively, and many of them have traditional music sessions. There's a belief that **The King's Head** on High Street was given as a reward to the executioner of Charles I. **Tigh Neachtain**, 17 Cross Street, is one of the oldest pubs in the city and **Murphys**, 9 High Street, is great for a quiet drink. Two of the most traditional are **Tig Coili** on Mainguard Street and **Taaffe's**, opposite at 19 Shop Street. The best-known pub is probably **The Quays**, which attracts great musicians, and has a restaurant. ☎ (091) 568-347; fax 567-405; thequays@iol.ie.

SHOPPING

Shops on Quay Street, Galway

If you want to buy just one thing associated with Galway, then it has to be a **Claddagh ring**. A band of gold or silver with two hands holding a crowned heart, it's a symbol of friendship and love.

The ring is named after the Claddagh, a fishing village on the outskirts of the city, where it was popular as a wedding ring. It's worn with the heart facing the nail to mean betrothal and towards the heart when married.

Jewelers all over Ireland stock Claddagh rings, but it's special buying one where many of the jewelers make them in their own workshops. Among them are **Woods** on Eglinton Street and **Hartmann** on William Street.

A Saturday morning market takes place around **Kirwan's Lane** near the 700-year-old **St. Nicholas' (Anglican) Church**.

Kennys Bookshop on High Street has a huge selection of rare and secondhand, mainly Irish, books, many signed by the authors. It's also an art gallery, so allow plenty of time to browse. They run a mail order service. See their Web site at www.kennys.ie.

County Galway

Connemara Sheep, West Galway

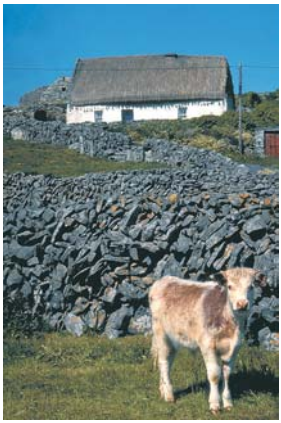
Follow the coast west of the city on the R366 via Salthill, and en route, if the weather allows, you'll be able to see the hills of Clare, the Burren and the Aran Islands. Barna is a pretty village with a pier, and next you come to the fishing village of Spiddal, at the edge of the **Connemara *Gaeltacht***. There's a good craft center on the way in on your right. Then you come to Inverin and the

Connemara airport, from which you can fly to the Aran Islands. Boats to the islands depart from the harbor of Rosaveal, on the coast beyond Inverin.

THE ARAN ISLANDS

The Aran Islands lie 30 miles (48 km) off the coast of Galway and Clare. There are three island: Inis Mór, Inis Oir and Inis Meain. The largest is **Inis Mór**. Among its attractions is **Dún Aonghasa**, a 2,500-year-old fort clinging to 300-foot cliffs. The fort is in the care of the State Heritage Service. Open year-round; daily until 6 pm, March-October; 4 pm the rest of the year. ☎ (099) 61008; fax 61009; dunaonghasa@ealga.ie.

Inis Meain is dominated by the massive **Dún Chonchúir**, a fortress dating to the Iron Age. The island is famous worldwide for its Aran knitwear.



Aran Farm

Geologically, **Inis Óirr** is an extension of the Burren in Co. Clare, with the limestone fissures concealing exotic plants and flowers (see www.westireland.travel.ie).

With their austere but beautiful landscapes, dry-stone walls, wonderful views of the Atlantic, and historic sites, all three islands are worth visiting. Their isolation for centuries has meant that they retain much of traditional Irish culture, including the language. They also have safe sandy beaches, sailboarding and boating, as well as facilities for angling. You hear great music, instrumental and vocal, in the islands' pubs.

GETTING HERE

Innishmór Ferries, owned by the islanders, runs a ferry service to Inis Mór. You travel by boat from Rosaveal in Connemara. There's a coach to Rosaveal from Galway, which takes an hour; the boat journey is about 20 minutes. There are several trips daily. Tickets are available from the ferry

office at 29 Forster Street, or the Galway Tourist Office. ☎ (091) 566-535; info@queenofaran2.com; www.queenofaran2.com.

Aer Arann operates four flights daily from Inverin in Connemara to the three islands; the service includes a bus from Galway (see above). Flights take about 10 minutes. ☎ (091) 593-034; www.aerarann.ie.

Connemara

Connemara, West Galway

Connemara is one of the most scenic, unspoiled areas in the entire country, with a rugged landscape of bogs and moors. It is dominated by two mountain ranges, called the Twelve Bens and the Maam, and fringed by an indented coastline of wide bays and sheltered harbors. Irish is still spoken here and visitors are made very welcome. As you travel around you'll see herds of **Connemara ponies**. These lively little animals may be descendants of horses that swam ashore when the Spanish Armada was wrecked off the coast in the 16th century.

Connemara National Park, Letterfrack, is open all year, offering walks, talks, an audio-visual show, and displays. Visitor Centre is open from May to the mid-October; ☎ (095) 41054.

As with the entire western seaboard, the weather in Connemara is very changeable – a wet day can end with a wonderful sunset or what began as a warm and sunny day can suddenly feel like winter – so be prepared.

CLIFDEN

Clifden is known as the capital of Connemara, and is set in wonderful scenery. It has a great range of shops, restaurants and pubs. Founded by John D'Arcy (1785-1839) as an attempt to create a commercial center in a resource-rich yet very poor area, it was one of the last towns to be built in the country.

THE SKY ROAD

The Sky Road, as its name suggests, takes you up the hills overlooking Clifden Bay and its islands, and is a circular route suited to cyclists and drivers. Start from Market Square in Clifden and follow the signs. Climb Monument Hill and enjoy spectacular views of the Twelve Bens.

Clifden Town, Connemara

ROUNDSTONE

Roundstone is a picturesque fishing village 14 miles (22.5 km) from Clifden, with beautiful beaches nearby. There are several pubs and cafés in the village. At the **Roundstone Musical Instruments** workshop the traditional Irish goatskin drum, the bodhrán, is made. Contact Malachy Kearns, IDA Craft Centre, Roundstone, ☎ (095) 35808, bodhran@iol.ie, www.bodhran.com.

Around Lough Corrib

For something different, visit **Glengowla Silver and Lead Mine**, two miles (3.2 km) west of Oughterard. The mine was abandoned in 1865. Open daily, March to November, 9:30 am to 6:30 pm, and most weekends in winter. ☎ (091) 552-360.

Kylemore Abbey and Lake

Kylemore Abbey is an 18th-century castle, now a Benedictine community and school. You can visit the grounds, including a six-acre Victorian walled garden and woodland walk, as well as part of the Abbey. Exhibition rooms and tea room are open all year, 9 am to 5:30 pm; the Craft Shop is open March to December until 6 pm. Grounds are open Easter to October, 10:30 am to 4:30 pm. ☎ (095) 41146; fax 41145; enquiries@kylemoreabbey.ie; www.kylemoreabbey.com.

ATHENRY

The medieval walled town of Athenry is a Heritage Town. Its **Castle** dates from about 1250 and is open daily, except Monday, June to mid-September, 10 am to 6 pm; April-October, until 5 pm. ☎ (091) 844-797; fax 845-796;athenrycastle@ealga.ie.

South of Galway City

South of Galway City on the N18 to Ennis is the Heritage Town of **Gort**. Several attractions nearby make a visit here worthwhile.

COOLE PARK

The former home of **Lady Augusta Gregory**, playwright and co-founder with Edward Martyn and W.B. Yeats of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, this site is just north of the town of Gort. Many Irish literary figures met here in the early 20th century, and carved their autographs into a tree in the walled garden. The woods and lake are lovely surroundings for a walk. The estate is now a nature reserve, with a Visitor Centre and tea rooms. Open daily from June to end August, 10 am-6 pm; Tuesday-Sunday from Easter to end September, it closes at 5 pm. ☎ (091) 631-804; fax 631-653; coolepark@ealga.ie.

Nearby is **Thoor Ballylee**, the tower bought by poet W.B. Yeats as a retreat; it has been restored and is open to the public. The **Kiltartan Museum**, housed in a former school in Gort, documents the literary history of Coole Park.

DUNGUAIRE CASTLE

Dunguaire Castle

Dunguaire Castle stands overlooking Galway Bay near Kinvara, south of Galway City. Built in 1520 it was bought by the writer Oliver St. John Gogarty early in the last century and hosted meetings of literary figures including Yeats, his patron Lady Gregory, J.M. Synge, and George Bernard Shaw. Today it's owned by Shannon Development, which runs medieval banquets here. Reserve at Tourist Offices or

☎ (061) 360-788; fax 361-020; reservations@shannon-dev.ie; www.shannonheritage.com.

East Galway

There's plenty of variety in the landscape of the eastern half of the county, with the Sliabh Aughty Mountains, forests, bogland, lakes, and rivers in the valleys, as well as pastures and floodlands stretching along the shores of the River Shannon and Lough Derg. Watch out for agricultural machinery on the narrow minor roads. Numerous monastic settlements from the 5th and 6th century were located in **Clonfert**. In the heart of the village is **Saint Brendan's Church of Ireland Cathedral**, the oldest living church in Ireland with an unbroken history of public worship.

Clonfert Cathedral

Saint Brendan is believed to have sailed up Lough Derg to his monastery at Clonfert before setting off on his voyage to America, 1,000 years before Columbus.

Red Deer, Portumna Castle Park

Portumna, 20 miles (32 km) from Ballinasloe, is a fishing center and marina for Lough Derg and the River Shannon, and a pleasant town. The imposing ruins of **Portumna Castle**, built before 1618, are in an attractive setting overlooking Lough Derg and Portumna Forest Park, once part of the demesne. The castle is in the care of the Heritage Service, open daily April 1 to October 31 from 10 am to 6 pm. ☎ (090) 974-1658; portumnacastle@opw.ie.

◆ Adventures

On Foot

The **Western Way** begins on the shores of Lough Corrib, winds through Connemara's Highlands, and continues on into Mayo. With clean air from the Atlantic and its unspoiled countryside, Co. Galway is ideal for walkers.

There are more than 50 mountains in Connemara in four ranges – the Twelve Bens, Maam Turks, Partry and Sheffrey, and they attract experienced hikers. Connaught's highest mountain, **Mweelrea** (2,688 feet/820 m), is at the mouth of Killary Harbor, one of Ireland's two fjords. The other is at Carlingford, Co. Louth.

Maps are available from Tourist Information offices or from specialist shops, including **The Outdoor Shop** (Faoin Tuath), Market Street, Clifden. ☎ (095) 22838; www.faointuath.com.

Make sure you wear appropriate clothing and footwear, check the weather in advance, and let someone know where you are going, especially if you are mountain climbing.

In East Galway, the **Portumna Forest Park** is open all year, and covers 1,000 acres, with walks through woodland and along the lakeshore.

On Water

FISHING

The **Western Regional Fisheries Board** looks after looks after Co. Galway, and the **North Western Regional Fisheries Board** is responsible for the rest of this region. Western Regional Fisheries Board, The Weir Lodge, Galway. Look at their Web sites for detailed information, www.wrfb.ie and www.northwestfisheries.ie, or call: Western ☎ (091) 563-118; North Western, ☎ (096) 22788.

For permits and information about Corrib River salmon fishing, contact The Fishery Manager, Galway Fishery, Nun's Island, Galway, ☎ (091) 562-388; fax 562-930; shartgalfish@eircom.net.

CRUISING & WATERSPORTS

Take a cruise from Wood Quay in Galway City on *The Corrib Princess*, which takes you along the River Corrib to Lough Corrib, passing historic monuments and fishing villages on the way. Contact **Corrib Tours**. ☎ (091) 592-447.

Corrib Cruises operates trips from Oughterard and Cong, daytime and evenings, ☎ (094) 954-6029; fax 954-6568; info@corribcruises.com, www.corribcruises.com.

Emerald Star, Portumna, hires out cruisers for vacations, call its HQ at Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim, ☎ (071) 962-7633; fax 962-1433; info@emeraldstar.ie www.emeraldstar.ie.

Scubadive West, in the sheltered Killary fjord, runs a variety of courses. ☎ (095) 43922; scubadivewest@eircom.net; www.scubadivewest.com.

Delphi Adventure Centre, Leenane, offers 25 different activities, including surfing, rock climbing, pony trekking. ☎ (095) 42208, fax 42303; delphigy@iol.ie; www.delphiadventureholidays.ie.

ORGANIZED TRIPS

Killary Tours, Leenane, offers a budget cycling tour for five days (four nights), with daily departures from April to September, as well as more luxurious choices. ☎ (095) 42276; www.killary.com.

On Horseback

Visitors to this region can enjoy some of the best scenery and riding trails in the whole country. Here are some of the riding centers:

- **Feeneys Equestrian**, Bushypark, Galway, ☎ (091) 527-579
- **Aillecross Equestrian Centre**, Loughrea, ☎ (091) 841-216
- **Cleggan Riding Centre**, Cashel, Connemara, ☎ (095) 44746
- **Clonboo Riding School**, Clonboo Cross, Corrundulla, ☎ (091) 791-362
- **Hilary & Caroline Crosby**, Millbrook, Ballinasloe, ☎ (0905) 43683

- **Errislannan Manor**, Clifden, ☎ (095) 21134
- **Glencree Riding Stables**, Lackagh, Turloughmore, ☎ (091) 797-104
- **Kinincha Stables** Ltd, Ballinamanton, Galway Road, Gort, ☎ (091) 631-297
- **Milchem Equestrian Centre**, Tynagh, Loughrea, ☎ (0905) 76388
- **Laragan Stable**, Cleggan, Co. Galway, offers beach rides and treks in Connemara. ☎ (095) 44735
- **Rusheen Riding Centre**, Salthill, near Galway City, ☎ (091) 521-285; rusheenriding@iol.ie www.galwayhorseriding.com

For Horse Lovers

At Kilreekill near Loughrea on the main Dublin road, the N6, is **Dartfield – Ireland's Horse Museum and Park**, which charts the history of the horse, and where you can see horses resting and working. Other attractions include a forge, tack room and art gallery, all on 350 acres of parkland, ideal for a walk. Open year-round, 9:30 am to 6 pm. ☎ (091) 843-968; info@dartfieldhorsemuseum.com; www.dartfieldhorsemuseum.com.

The **Ballinasloe Horse Fair**, held in October, has ancient origins, and horses were bought here during the 18th and 19th centuries for the cavalries of Europe.

Galway Racecourse, Ballybrit. ☎ (091) 753-870; fax 752-592; www.galwayraces.com, galway@iol.ie.

◆ Golf

- **Galway Golf Club**, Salthill, ☎ (091) 522-033
- **Athenry Golf Club**, Oranmore, ☎ (091) 794-466
- **Ballinasloe Golf Club**, ☎ (095) 964-2126
- **Bearna**, ☎ (091) 592-756
- **Connemara Golf Club**, Clifden, ☎ (095) 23502
- **Connemara Isles**, on island linked by causeway at Lettermore, ☎ (091) 572-498
- **Galway Bay Golf Club**, Renvyle, ☎ (091) 790-503
- **Gort Golf Club**, ☎ (091) 632-244
- **Loughrea Golf Club**, ☎ (091) 841-049

- **Mountbellew Golf Club**, Ballinasloe, ☎ (0905) 79259
- **Oughterard Golf Club**, ☎ (091) 552-131
- **Portumna Golf Club**, ☎ (090) 974-1059
- **Tuam Golf Club**, ☎ (093) 28993

◆ Where to Stay

Hotels

ACCOMMODATIONS

$ . . . . . under $60
$$. $61-120
$$$. $121-182
$$$$. $183-243
$$$$$. . . . . over $244

☆☆☆ **Jury's Inn**, Quay Street, next to historic Spanish Arch. Rooms sleep three adults, or two adults and a child. Per room from $$, best rates online. ☎ (091) 566-444; www.jurysdoyle.com.

Travelodge, on Tuam Road; rooms sleep 2 adults and 2 children or three adults/one child. Rates per room, cheapest online, from $$. ☎ (091) 781-400; www.travelodge.ie.

☆☆☆ **Shannon Oaks Hotel and Country Club**, Portumna, a few yards from Portumna Castle and Forest Park, and a short walk to the marina. The staff is charming and helpful, there's a choice of 63 comfortable and well-equipped rooms and suites, and they have a leisure center with gym and pool, health and beauty rooms. There's often music in the **Idle Hour bar**. You can choose to eat in the **Upper Deck** there, which is popular with locals and excellent value, or, for a more extensive menu, in the **Castlegates Restaurant**. The hotel belongs to the Irish Country Hotels marketing group. Rates from $$. ☎ (090) 974-1777; fax 974-1357; sales@shannonoaks.ie; www.shannonoaks.ie.

Cregg Castle, which dates from 1648 and is neither a guesthouse nor hotel, is where to stay if you want to meet others, enjoy a chat or impromptu music session. It's nine miles (14.4km) from Galway City, and surrounded by 160 acres of farmland and woods, ideal for walking.

Breakfast is served until lunchtime; limited evening menu, no bar but wine served or bring your own. From $$. ☎ (091) 791-434; www.creggcastle.com.

One of my favorite spots in the whole country is around Leenane and a delightful place to stay there is **Delphi Lodge**, a country house surrounded by woods and mountains, overlooking a lake. It belongs to the Hidden Ireland group of historic houses. There are only 11 bedrooms; dinner is served at a huge oak table presided over by the person who has caught the day's largest salmon. There's a library and roaring fires, so if you just want to laze and read, you can. Rates from $$. ☎ (095) 42211; fax 42296; delfish@iol.ie; www.mayo-ireland.ie.

Rentals & Hostels

Irish Cottage Holiday Homes has a choice of houses in the county. Central Reservations, ☎ (01) 475-7596; info@irishcottageholidays.com; www.irishcottageholidays.com.

There are two hostels in Galway City, one on Inishere, another on Inishbofin Island, and six others around the county. They're all members of the **Independent Holiday Hostels of Ireland**. ☎ (01) 836-4700; info@hostels-ireland.com; www. hostels-ireland.com.

Camping & RV Parks

☆☆ **Ballyloughane Caravan and Camping Park**, Renmore, open May to mid-September. ☎ (091) 752-029; fax 753-098; galwcamp@iol.ie.

☆☆ Connemara Caravan & Camping Park, Renvyle, open May to September, ☎ (095) 43406.

☆☆ **Renvyle Beach Park**, open from March 17 to late September. ☎ (095) 43462.

☆☆ Shanaheever Campsite, Clifden, open May to late September, ☎ (095) 22150.

☆☆ **Spiddal Park**, open mid-March to mid-October. ☎ (091) 553-372; fax 553-976; paircsaoire@eircom.net.

◆ Where to Eat

In Galway City there is a huge choice of places to eat, including in its pubs. Take a walk around and check menu boards.

Maxwell McNamaras is on Williamsgate Street, just off Eyre Square. It's open seven days, from 9 am to 11 pm, and is usually busy, which is a good sign. It serves breakfast, lunch and dinner, and

its menu includes steaks, seafood, chicken and pasta dishes. ☎ (091) 565-727; fax 564-379.

Mitchell's Restaurant, Market Street, Clifden, is open from March to the end of October, daily, noon to 11 pm. It serves seafood, steaks, and vegetarian dishes, and its Irish stew is highly recommended. ☎ (095) 21867; fax 21066.

O'Dowds Seafood Restaurant & Bar is at Roundstone, overlooking the harbor. As well as seafood, traditional Irish dishes are on its menu. It's open every day from noon to 11 pm. ☎ (095) 35809; fax 35907; owdowds@indigo.ie; www.odowdsrestaurant.com.

Paddy Burkes is south of Galway City at Clarinbridge on the main road to Ennis and Limerick. It's recommended by top food guides, including *Egon Ronay*, and serves modern Irish and vegetarian cuisine. Open Monday-Saturday, 10:30 am to 11:30 pm; Sunday, noon to 9:30 pm. ☎ (091) 796-226; fax 796-016; www.paddyburkes-galway.com.

TRY SOME OYSTERS

With some of the cleanest seas in Europe, Co. Galway is famous for its seafood – especially oysters, with annual festivals in the city and in Clarenbridge just outside. You really should try oysters at least once with brown bread and a glass of stout, and Galway is the ideal place to do so.

County Mayo

Stretching from Lough Corrib in the south to Killala Bay in the north, and looking out over **Clew Bay** and the Atlantic Ocean, Mayo has lots of attractions, including beautiful mountain scenery, remote bogs and wonderful beaches. It has excellent fishing waters at Lough Conn, Lough Mask, and the River Moy, great golf courses, lots of walking trails and a host of historic ruins to explore. Achill, Ireland's largest island, is joined to the mainland by a bridge.

Remains of the area's first settlements dating back 5,000 years can be seen in ancient monuments that include standing stones, *fulachta fiadh* (Bronze Age cooking sites) and ring forts. There are ruined ab-

beys, friaries and churches all over the county. North Mayo and Croagh Patrick in particular have strong associations with St. Patrick. In addition to natural beauty, Mayo has fine sports facilities and visitor centres. The three main towns are **Castlebar**, the county capital, **Ballina**, the county's largest town, and **Westport**.

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

There are two places in Co. Mayo where you can research your family. The **North Mayo Family Heritage Centre** is at Enniscoe, near Ballina. It's an agricultural and rural museum with a forge, as well as an ancestry centre. There's a walled garden and tea room. ☎ (096) 31809; fax 31885. The **South Mayo Family Research Centre** is on Main Street, Ballinrobe. ☎/fax (094) 954-1214.

◆ Getting Here

By Air

Knock International Airport is at Charlestown; ☎ (094) 936-7222; www.knockairport.com. Regular flights from Dublin with **Logan Air**, www.ba.com; Gatwick (London) with **EasyJet**, www.easyjet.com; Gatwick, Luton and Stansted (London) with **Ryanair**, www.ryanair.com; Manchester and Birmingham with **British Midland**, www.bmibaby.com.

By Road

Mayo's capital, **Castlebar**, is reached from Galway by taking the N17 to Claremorris and then continuing north on the N60. Castlebar is connected to the county's largest town, Ballina, by the N58 to Foxford and then the N26. To get to Ballina from Dublin, take the N26-N5-N4.

◆ Tourist Information

The **Westport Tourist Office**, open all year, except Sundays, is on James Street, ☎ (098) 25711; fax 26709; westport@irelandwest.ie.

Museums of Mayo, www.museumsofmayo.com

◆ Sightseeing

Westport

Sailing on Clew Bay

Westport is a charming and very attractive town, much of it designed by the architect James Wyatt during the Georgian period. **The Mall**, with its lime trees lining both sides of the Carrowbeg River, is very special. The town is known as a sea-fishing center, and also has many lively traditional pubs with plenty of Irish music. It's at the mouth of **Clew Bay**, with beaches nearby.

The holy mountain of **Croagh Patrick**, where Saint Patrick is said to have performed his snake-banishing act, is five miles (eight km) from the town. Known locally as the **Reek**, it's climbed regularly by pilgrims, most barefoot, especially on the last Sunday in July. There are wonderful views of Clew Bay and the countryside as you climb. The **Croagh Patrick Information Centre** is in Murrisk on the Pilgrim's Path at the base of the mountain, opposite the National Famine Monument. ☎ (098) 64114; fax 64115; croaghpatrick@ireland.com.

Westport House is a mile from the town. It's the home of the Marquess of Sligo, a fine Georgian mansion, and is open mid-May to mid-September.

Ballina, the largest town in the county, is on the River Moy and attracts anglers from all over the world, many of whom fish for salmon from its bridges.

North Mayo

The **Mullet Peninsula** in North Mayo is an area of unspoiled natural beauty and a *Gaeltacht* or Irish-speaking region. The peninsula is popular for sea angling, and is also renowned for its unique bird life.

THE LARGEST STONE AGE MONUMENT IN THE WORLD

Near Ballycastle, on the R314 east of the Mullet peninsula, are the ***Céide* Fields**. Preserved under the wild bogland are field systems, dwelling areas and megalithic tombs dating back 5,000 years. The site is in the care of the Heritage Service, with guided tours available. Wear sensible shoes and rainwear. There's an exhibition and tea room. Open daily from mid-March to the end of October. ☎ (096) 43325; ceidefields@opw.ie.

AN OUTSTANDING ATHLETE

Bohola, between Swinford and Castlebar, should be of interest to visitors from the US. It was the birthplace of the athlete Martin J. Sheridan (1881-1918), who won a staggering nine Olympic medals for his adopted country in discus, high and long jump, shot-put, and pole-vaulting. There's a memorial to him in the village.

Castlebar

Ballintubber Abbey, Castlebar

Castlebar, the administrative capital of the county, grew up around a castle built by the de Barra (Barry) family. It became a garrison town and was central in a number of historical events, including the French arriving to support the Irish rebellion of 1798 – known as "the Races of Castlebar."

Today it's a bustling market town, with lively night-time entertainment, including traditional Irish music in hotels and pubs, as well as a choice of good restaurants.

Castlebar is surrounded by some of the best fishing lakes in this part of the country, as well as signposted walking routes.

The Museum of Country Life is in Turlough Park, off the N5, four miles (6.4 km) from Castlebar on the road to Galway. Open daily except Mondays, admission free. Tours, shop, café. ☎ Lo-call in Ireland 1-890-687-386; www.museum.ie.

Achill Island

Minaun Cliffs, Achill Island

Achill Island is one of my favorite places, so beautiful it's hard to describe. Connected to the mainland by a bridge, it has sea-cliffs, wild moors, mountains, lakes, and valleys. There are several unpolluted sandy beaches, some little villages, excellent deep-sea, shore, and lake angling, and traces of famine dwellings on its hillsides. It's also a *Gaeltacht* (Irish-speaking) area.

TWO UNUSUAL HOUSES

During the late 1870s, bad weather, poor crops and declining cattle prices produced an agrarian crisis in Mayo and resulted in many evictions. **Eviction Cottage**, Elmhall, Belcarra, is the former home of the Walshe family, who were evicted in 1886. It has been refurbished as a Heritage Centre by the local community. Open June to September. ☎ (087) 909-0046 (mobile); marybprendergast@ireland.com. There's a river walk and fishing area nearby.

John Ford's 1951 film *The Quiet Man*, starring John Wayne, Maureen O'Hara and Barry Fitzgerald, was made in Cong. The **Quiet Man Cottage Museum** on Circular Road, Cong, is a replica of the cottage used in the film. Open daily, 10 am to 5pm. ☎ (094) 954-6089; quiet.man.cong@iol.ie.

Knock

The village of Knock is on the N17 half way between Galway and Sligo. It was the scene of an apparition by Our Lady, Mother of Jesus, in 1879 and since then the huge shrine and church attracts thousands of pilgrims every year. Pope John Paul II visited it in 1989.

In its grounds is the **Knock Folk Museum**. Open daily in May, June, September and October, 10 am to 6 pm; in July and August, 10 am to 7 pm. ☎ (094) 938-8100; knockmuseum@eircom.net.

Foxford

If you're looking for a gift or souvenir, first follow the self-guided tour at the **Foxford Woollen Mills Visitor Centre**, where the shop has a wide range of Irish-made giftware, a jewelry workshop, two art galleries and a restaurant. There's also a Tourist Information Office at the gate.

Open year-round, Monday to Saturday, 10 am to 6 pm, and on Sunday, 2 to 6 pm; from May to October, Sunday hours are noon-6 pm. ☎ (094) 925-6756; foxfordwoollenmills@eircom.net.

◆ Adventures

On Foot

Mayo offers a great variety of walks, from easygoing to tough mountain climbing. You can buy guides to walks, including the waymarked **Western Way** and **Foxford Way**, or check www.walkireland.ie for details.

On Wheels

Although much of the county is suitable for cycling, there's only one signposted trail for bikes: the **Humbert Route**. This runs from Kilcummin, near Ballina in North Mayo to Charlestown, where it crosses into Co. Sligo. It continues through Sligo and Leitrim, ending in Ballinamuck, Co. Longford.

Mayo Leisure Cycling, Castlebar, is one company offering self-guided tours. ☎ (094) 902-5220.

On Water

Lough Corrib, at 68 square miles (177 square km), is the largest lake in the Republic and is also one of the cleanest and least spoiled in Europe, with some 365 little islands on it. **Corrib Cruises** operates a choice of trips on the Lough from Lisloughrey Pier. Check their Web site at www.corribcruises.com.

Watersports, including surfing and diving, are particularly popular in this area, and there are a number of adventure centers.

FISHING

There's great diversity for anyone interested in fishing in sea, lake and river. Remember that you must have licenses for trout and salmon fishing and you can get them from tackle and equipment shops in Mayo. Western Regional Fisheries Board, ☎ (091) 563-118, www.wrfb.ie.

TRIPS & VACATIONS

Tony and Mary Burke, Cashel, Achill Island, offer deep-sea angling vacations and sightseeing trips on a fully insured charter vessel. ☎/fax (098) 47257; tmburke@eircom.net.

Riverside Fishing Holidays, Swinford, offers accommodation with their own tackle shop. ☎/fax (094) 925-2729; info@riversidefishing.com.

Peter and Patricia Roberts, Loughbawn, Partry, has B&B accommodations and angling services. ☎ (094) 954-3046; robertspartry@eircom.net.

USEFUL CONTACTS

- **Achill Adventure & Leisure Holidays**, Dugort, in the family-run McDowells Hotel; ☎ (098) 43148; www.achill-leisure.ie
- **Achill Outdoor Education Centre**, Cashel, ☎ (098) 47253
- **Glenans Irish Sailing**, Collanmore Island, runs residential courses. ☎ (01) 661-1481; info@glenans-ireland.com; www.glenans-ireland.com

On Horseback

There are several equestrian centers offering trekking and trail riding on both the hardy Connemara ponies and Irish hunters. Among them are the following:

- **Carrowholly Stables & Trekking Centre**, Westport, ☎ (098) 27057
- **Drummindoo Stud & Equitation Centre**, Westport, ☎ (098) 25616

◆ Golf

Mayo is a wonderfully scenic area in which to play golf, with a choice of courses. There is a links course at **Carne**, near Belmullet. **Westport's** 18-hole championship course combines links and parkland; **Ballinrobe**, ☎ (094) 954-1118, bgcgolf@iol.ie, **Ballina** and **Castlebar** also have 18-hole courses. There are nine-hole courses on **Achill Island**, and in **Ballyhaunis**, **Claremorris**, and **Swinford**. Contact Westport Tourist Office for details, ☎ (098) 25711, fax 26709, westport@irelandwest.ie.

◆ Where to Stay

For accommodations pricing guide, see page 375.

Hotels

☆☆ **Cill Aodain Hotel** is on Main Street, Kiltimagh, a rural village in the middle of County Mayo surrounded by beautiful scenery. It has 15 bedrooms, individually and pleasantly furnished. Its restaurant is open in the evening to non-residents, and serves European and Irish cuisine prepared with good local produce. It's a member of Irish Country Hotels marketing group. Rates from $$. ☎ (01) 295-8900; cillaodain@irishcountryhotels.com, www.irishcountryhotels.com.

☆☆ **Hogan's Hotel**, Ballina, dates back to 1830 and retains many of its original features. It's family-run, near town center. Rates from $$. ☎ (096) 21350; fax 71882 info@hoganshotel.ie www.hoganshotel.ie.

☆☆ **Welcome Inn Hotel**, Castlebar, has 43 bedrooms, some with Jacuzzi or four-poster beds. Raynards restaurant serves breakfast, lunch and dinner. During the summer there's entertainment, including traditional Irish music and dance. Rates from $$. ☎ (094) 902-2288; fax 902-1766; welcomeinn@eircom.net, www.welcomeinnhotel.net.

McDowells Hotel, rates from $ including breakfast; ☎ (098) 43148; www.achill-leisure.ie.

Rental Properties

On Achill Island you can rent a cottage, then explore the island and farther afield.

☆☆☆ to ☆☆☆☆ **Keel Holiday Cottages** are south of Lough Keel under the Slievemore Mountain; you can walk from them to the Blue Flag beach at Keel. ☎ (094) 903-2054; fax 903-2351; www.mayoholidays.com, post@mayoholidays.com.

Ireland West has a self-catering department. Contact them at ☎ (091) 537-777; fax 537-780; selfcatering@irelandwest.ie.

Camping & RV Parks

☆☆☆☆ **Keel Sandybanks**, on Achill, is open from late May to early September. ☎ (098) 43211; info@achillcamping.com, www.achillcamping.com.

☆☆☆☆ The **Belleek Park** is just outside Ballina, open from March to the end of October. ☎ (096) 71533; lenahan@indigo.ie.

☆☆☆ There's a caravan and camping park in the grounds of Westport House, called **Parkland**, open from mid-May to early September. ☎ (098) 27766; camping@westporthouse.ie; www.westporthouse.ie.

☆☆☆ **Seal Caves Caravan and Camping Park** is at Dugort, Achill Island, open from April to the end of September. ☎ (098) 43262.

☆☆☆ The **Cong Caravan and Camping Park** is open all year. ☎ (092) 46089; quiet.man.cong@iol.ie; www.quietman-cong.com.

☆☆☆ **Lough Lannagh Caravan Park**, Castlebar, is open from early January until just before Christmas. ☎ (094) 902-7111, llv@eircom.net.

☆☆☆ The **Knock Park** is open from March to the end of October. ☎ (094) 88100; info@knock-shrine.ie; www.knock-shrine.ie.

☆☆ The **Carra Park** at Belcarra, near Castlebar, has a limited number of spaces for tents and touring caravans, as it's the base for horse-drawn caravan trips; ☎ (094) 903-2054; post@mayoholidays.com www.horsedrawn.mayonet.com.

Hostels

The Wayfarer Hostel, Keel, Achill Island, is open mid-March to early October. ☎ (098) 43266.

Old Mill Hostel, Westport, is open all year, except Christmas week. ☎ (098) 27045; oldmill@iol.ie.

Cong Hostel is open all year. ☎ (094) 954-6089; quiet.man.cong@iol.ie

Club Atlantic Hostel, Westport, opens from early March to the end of October. ☎ (098) 26644.

Kilcommon Lodge Hostel, Pullathomas, is open all year. ☎ (097) 84621; kilcommonlodge@eircom.net.

◆ Where to Eat

Crockets on the Quay is not only a restaurant, it's also a pub with three bars and an eight-bedroom guesthouse. It's on the waterside just outside Ballina on the road to Sligo. There's been a pub here since the 1800s. The restaurant is open daily, from noon to 3 pm and 6 to 10:30 pm. Bar food available all day until 8:30 pm. From $. ☎ (096) 75930; fax 70069; info@crocketsonthequay.ie; www.crocketsonthequay.ie.

Gaughran's Pub, on O'Rahilly Street in Ballina, is an authentic 1930s pub where its owner Mary Gaughan offers a different main course daily. It could be meat loaf, chicken fillet in a cream sauce or smoked wild salmon. She also makes delicious brown bread and soup. Desserts include her own ice cream. Food served Monday-Saturday, from 11 am to 6 pm. ☎ (096) 70096.

The Anchor Bar & Restaurant at Golden Strand, Dugort, Achill Island, looks out over the golden beach and has a real turf fire and traditional music playing. The restaurant is open in the summer from 6:30 to 9 pm. ☎ (098) 47216; martinmasterson@hotmail.com.

County Roscommon

Roscommon takes its name from two words: *ros*, a wooded or pleasant gentle height, and the bishop-saint *Coman*, who founded an abbey in what is now the county capital.

It's an inland county, mostly flat and dotted with lakes, with some low hills. The River Shannon runs along the eastern edge of the county, and the western part is under bog. **Rathcrogan** in its center was the home of the Kings of Connacht and later the High Kings, and there's

evidence of ancient human habitation all over the county, with many burial mounds, megalithic tombs and ring forts.

Although the county capital is **Roscommon**, the largest town is **Boyle**; other important towns include **Castlerea** and **Strokestown**.

◆ Getting Here

Roscommon Town is served by N61-N6-N4 from Dublin (91 miles/146 km); N61-N6-N62-N8-N25 from Cork (156 miles/251 km); and N61-N6-N18 from Galway (51 miles/82 km). Belfast is 139 miles (223 km) away.

It's on the railway. Roscommon Station, ☎ (090) 662-6201.

The nearest airport is Knock International; see page 378.

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

County Roscommon Heritage & Genealogy Centre, Church Street, Strokestown, ☎ (071) 963-3380; fax 963-3398; www.roscommonroots.com.

◆ Tourist Information

Roscommon Tourism, Library Building, Abbey Street, Roscommon. ☎ (090) 662-6342; tourism@roscommon.ie; www.visitroscommon.com.

◆ Sightseeing

Roscommon Town

Roscommon Town was founded in early Christian times around the **Abbey of St. Coman**. Later expansion included the **Norman castle**, built in 1269, and the **Dominican priory**, built in 1253. Before the Cromwellian Plantation in the 17th century, which displaced

Roscommon Town

Irish Catholics to poorer lands, much of the surrounding area belonged to the O'Kellys.

Nowadays the town, surrounded by fertile farmland, is lively and prosperous, with some impressive buildings on its wide main street.

The **County Museum** is open all year, Monday-Friday, 10 am-4 pm. ☎ (090) 662-5613.

Nearby is the building that was once the county jail, built in the early 1740s by the local landlord, the Earl of Essex. The building was a jail and then a lunatic asylum; later it served as a refuge for smallpox sufferers and eventually became a private house. Only the façade is left; the building now houses an arcade of shops and a restaurant on the ground floor.

Roscommon Abbey

In **Roscommon Abbey** there's a late 13th-century effigy of its founder Felim O'Conor on a later tomb with eight mail-clad warriors representing gallowglasses (professional soldiers in medieval times). Roscommon Castle is on a hill just outside the town and is quite impressive, although it burned down in 1690 and after that fell into ruin. It had an interesting history, surviving sieges and being partly blown up by Cromwell's soldiers in 1652.

There's an 18-hole public **golf course** near the town, and the **racecourse** has events in summer and autumn.

There are a number of interesting outlets around the county where craftspeople produce items that would make original gifts and souvenirs. Don't feel you have to buy, but do take a look. Roscommon Tourism publishes a map-brochure or take a look at www.roscommon.craft.com.

Boyle

Boyle is in the north of the county, between Loughs Gara and Key, below the Curlew Mountains, and is a charming small town. The area is popular for fishing.

King House was the 18th-century home of the family that later became Earls of Kingston; Main Street, Boyle, was originally the ave-

nue leading to the house. A visit is worthwhile. You may explore at your own pace with a self-guided tour and learn not just about the history of the family and the town of Boyle but also something of the chieftains who ruled the area. Open from April to late September, daily 10 am-6 pm (last admission 5 pm). ☎ (071) 966-3242, fax 966-3243; kinghouse@roscommoncoco.ie.

At King House is the ***Una Bhan*** **Tourism Centre**, with a restaurant and craft shop. ☎ (071) 966-3033, fax 966-2958; unabhan@indigo.ie; www.unabhan.net.Beside the Dublin-Sligo road are the restored ruins of **Boyle Abbey**, founded in 1161 and surviving all sorts of turbulent events for 400 years, due to its location on an important route. There's a small interpretative center in its gatehouse. Open Easter to late Ocotber, daily, 10 am to 6 pm; ☎ (071) 966-2604.

Frybrook House, in the center of Boyle, dates from around 1750. There's a tradition that a bell was rung at 5 pm every day inviting anyone in who wanted to dine! Nowadays, you can visit from June to September, Wednesday to Sunday, 2 to 6 pm. ☎ (071) 966-3513.

Frybrook House

Around Lough Key

Just over a mile east of Boyle or seven miles west of Carrick-on-Shannon is **Lough Key Forest Park**, one of the largest parks in the country, covering 840 acres. Inside the parkland is the almost-circular Lough Key, part of the River Shannon system, with beautiful wooded islands.

You can rent boats nearby or go for a trip on the lough on the luxury 50-seater *Trinity*, plus there's a camping, an RV site, and picnic areas. The park is open all year round. ☎ (071) 966-7037; www.coillte.ie/tourism, lkb@eircom.net.

Ancient Burial Site

At **Tulsk**, where the N5 and N61 intersect, between Boyle and Roscommon, is an important ancient site. There are 60 National Monuments here; visit the ***Cruachan Aí*** (Plain of the Mounds) Visitor Centre at the entrance to Tulsk village. You'll learn about the archaeology, history and mythology of one of the most important Celtic Royal sites in Europe. Tours are available and there's a café, as well as a craft and gift shop. Open year-round; June to September, Monday to Saturday, 9 am to 6 pm, Sunday to 5 pm; October to May, Monday to Saturday, 9 am to 5 pm. ☎ (071) 963-9268; fax 963-9060; cruachanai@esatclear.ie; www.cruachanai.com.

The Arigna Scenic Drive

The most attractive section of the signposted Arigna Scenic Drive is from Keadue over the Kilronan Mountain and then down to **Ballyfarnon**. Do take care, as the road is steep and narrow, with tight bends to negotiate, but the drive is worth it for the marvelous views.

*Ballyfarnon is associated with the blind harpist **Turlough O'Carolan**, known as "the last of the bards," whose harp you can see at Clonalis House, Castlerea. The Keadue O'Carolan Harp Festival is held annually in August, in his memory.*

Strokestown

Strokestown's wide avenue leads to the gates of **Strokestown Park House**, which, along with its **Gardens** and **Famine Museum**, is open to the public. Richard Castle (or Cassells) designed both the town and house in the 18th century for the Mahon family. In 1979 a local garage owner bought the house and the last family member packed her case and left – literally. All the family's furniture and other possessions are still there. Books, linen, family photos, toys, even the schoolwork carried out under the watchful eyes of a governess in the nursery, can be seen.

The Famine Museum is housed in the estate's former stables. During the Great Famine (1845-50), the Strokestown estate attracted inter-

national attention when the landlord, Major Denis Mahon, was shot dead after trying to clear two-thirds of his estate's tenants through eviction and emigration.

The museum uses the extensive collection of estate papers to explain the significance of the Famine nationally and locally, and also draws parallels between contemporary world hunger and the experiences of Ireland in its past. Open daily from Easter to the end of October, 9:30 am to 5:30 pm. There are also guided tours of the house. The **Carvery Restaurant** is open daily. ☎ (071) 963-3013; fax 33712; info@strokestownpark.ie; www.strokestownpark.ie.

Castlerea

In the western part of the county is the busy market town of Castlerea, surrounded by lovely wooded countryside.

Clonalis House, the ancestral home of the O'Conor clan, is just west of the town on the N60 to Castlebar. The family dates back to 75 AD and so is the oldest in Europe. Among its ancestors were 11 High Kings and 24 Kings of Connaught. Note that their surname has one letter "n", which is fairly unusual.

Clonalis House

The current owners, Pyers and Marguerite O'Conor Nash, are a lovely couple, who enjoy showing Clonalis to visitors. The house was built in the late 19th century, so is new in comparison to the antiquity of the family, and the 1,500 years they've owned these lands. Its contents are fascinating, including over 10,000 documents, a fraction of which are on display, and the O'Carolan harp. The blind harpist and composer of some of the most wonderful music for that instrument used to entertain members of the O'Conor family. Outside the house is the O'Conor Coronation Stone. The surrounding estate is wooded and attractive. For opening times, ☎/fax (094) 962-0014; www.clonalis.com, clonalis@iol.ie. You can stay in Clonalis between mid-April and the end of September.

◆ Adventures

On Foot

You can walk in the Castlerea Demesne, or along the River Francis, which flows into the River Suck. There's a network of walking routes called **The Miner's Way and Historical Trail** that wind not only through part of Roscommon, but also through the adjoining counties, Leitrim and Sligo; www.walkireland.com.

Knockvicar Bridge is where the Irish Chieftain O'Sullivan Beare rested on the last night before he and his men reached O'Rourke's castle at Leitrim village. Their journey is remembered in the long-distance waymarked walk, the **Beara Way**. Only 35 survived out of the 1,000 who fled with him from West Cork. There is a pleasant walk along the towpath here. See www.bearatourism.com for details on the walk. Nearby is Riversdale farmhouse, where Hollywood actress Maureen O'Sullivan spent part of her childhood.

Also in Castlerea is a most unusual museum "building" – **Sean Browne's railway museum** is housed in a locomotive in Hell's Kitchen Bar, where there are lots of items on display; ☎ (094) 962-0181; info@hellskitchenmuseum.com, www.hellskitchenmuseum.com.

On Wheels

Roscommon is a great county for cyclists, as it's so flat. The **Green Heartlands Cycle Route** stretches for 135 miles, along a series of quiet country roads. Contact Green Heartlands Cycle Route, c/o Suck Valley Visitors Centre, Athleague; ☎ (090) 666-3602; tench@indigo.ie.

On Water

FISHING

Roscommon is a great destination for fishing, with many different locations and angling centers. The Western, North Western and the Shannon are the regional fishing boards involved (www.wrfb.ie, www.northwestfisheries.ie, www.shannon-fishery-board.ie).

At Athleague, on the N63 southeast of Roscommon Town, a former Protestant church is now an **Angling and Visitors Centre**, where

you can get information, not just about fishing. It's also the booking office for accommodation and tours. The Centre is open all year round, and has a coffee and craft shop. ☎ (090) 666-3602; www.suckvalley.com, info@suckvalley.com.

On Horseback

Munsboro Equestrian and Leisure Centre, 1½ miles (2.4 km) from Roscommon Town. ☎ (090) 662-6449.

◆ Golf

Roscommon Golf Club, Mote Park, is close to the town. ☎ (090) 662-6382; rosgolfclub@eircom.net.

Carrick-on-Shannon Golf Club, ☎ (071) 966-7015; www.carrickgolfclub.ie.

◆ Where to Stay

Hotels

ACCOMMODATIONS	
$	under $60
$$	$61-120
$$$	$121-182
$$$$	$183-243
$$$$$	over $244

☆☆☆ **Shannon Key West Hotel** is on the river on the N4 main Dublin-to-Sligo road, with wonderful views of the Shannon from its bedrooms and roof gardens. It has a leisure club and tennis court, and its **Rooskey Inn** and **Kilglass Restaurant** both serve a good choice of food. Rates from $$. ☎ (071) 963-8800; fax 963-8811; www.bestwestern.com.

☆☆☆ **Abbey Hotel**, on the Galway side of Roscommon Town, is an 18th-century manor house that has been sensitively transformed into a welcoming hotel. It's surrounded by four acres of grounds, with lovely lawns and gardens, and has 51 attractively furnished bedrooms, and a leisure center with swimming pool. Its restaurant is open to non-residents. It's a member of Irish Country Hotels marketing group. Rates from $$, with special breaks available. ☎ (090) 295-8900; abbeyhotel@irishcountryhotels.com; www.irishcountryhotels.com.

☆☆ **O'Garas' Royal Hotel** is right in the middle of Roscommon Town, a rather old-fashioned yet welcoming place to stay. It's family-

run and its bar and restaurant are popular with locals. The bedroom I was given was enormous, but as it's a two-star, had no tea and coffee making facilities. I could, however, read in bed – a definite plus. $. ☎ (090) 662-6317.

Why is it that so many hotels, including many of the more expensive places to stay, are designed by those who never read? I always travel with a clip-on light, which you can buy in any electrical supply store.

Clonalis House, near Castlerea, belongs to the Hidden Ireland group so is not classified under the star system. You can stay here from mid-April to the end of September on a bed-and-breakfast basis. Dinner is available Tuesday through Saturday, but give 24 hours notice. Rates $$. ☎/fax (094) 962-0014; clonalis@iol.ie.

Camping & RV Parks

In addition to the Lough Key Park already mentioned, there are other sites.

☆☆☆☆ **Hodson Bay**, open June to September, is on the shores of Lough Ree, on the N61 near Athlone. ☎ (090) 649-2448.

☆☆☆ **Gailey Bay** at Knockcroghery is also family-run, and is open from late April to mid-October. It's part of a self-contained vacation park on the shores of Lough Ree; facilities include a pitch-and-putt course, boat rental and fishing tackle, mobile homes for hire. ☎ (090) 666-1058.

☆ **Willowbrook** is a family-run park in the Lung Valley, near Ballaghaderreen, and it is open all year. ☎ (094) 986-1307; www.willowbrookpark.com.

Battlebridge Caravan & Camping Park, near Leitrim Village on the bank of the Shannon, is open all year, ☎ (071) 965-0824.

◆ Where to Eat

Gleesons Townhouse and Restaurant is on the Market Square in Roscommon Town in a tastefully restored 19th-century house next to the Tourist Office and Museum and is a three-star guesthouse with 19 bedrooms, offering standard and superior suites. Rates from $$, with no single

supplement unless a double room is requested. The **Café** is open from 8 am to guests and non-residents, and serves a range of hot and cold dishes, as well as delicious snacks.

The **Manse Restaurant** has won awards for the quality of its cooking. It's open for lunch and dinner and guests can relax in front of an open fire in its reception area. Its cuisine combines Irish and European influences. Open from Sunday to Thursday, 8 am to 9 pm, and on Fridays and Saturdays until 10 pm. ☎ (090) 662-6954; fax 662-7425; www.gleesontownhouse.com.

Also in Market Square, Roscommon, is **Regans**, another three-star guesthouse, which is also a bar with a restaurant. It has 14 bedrooms, and two apartments with kitchens. Its restaurant offers good food at reasonable prices. ☎ (090) 662-5339; fax 27833; info@regans.com; www. regansbar.com.

Donnellan's Pub at Clarendon House, Knockvicar near Boyle, is open for Sunday lunch and for dinner from Tuesday through Sunday in summer and Thursday through Sunday in winter. It also offers half-board and cook-for-yourself accommodation. The Donnellans will arrange fishing trips, including boat rental, and they have a tackle and bait store. ☎ (071) 966-7016; clarendonhouse@ireland.com.

Keenans, in the pretty village of Termonbarry on the banks of the Shannon, is a traditional pub with restaurant, choice of menus, both excellent value. Chosen by The *Bord Iascaigh Mhara* (Irish Sea Fisheries Board) for its Seafood Circle Pub Lunch Programme. They also own 3-star Shannonside guesthouse, ☎ (043) 26098; info@keenans.ie www.keenans.ie.

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1. Sea Cliffs (*Slieve League*)
2. Glenveagh National Park & Castle
3. Inch Island
4. Inis Eoghan Peninsula
5. Fort Dunree Military Museum
6. Maritime Museum & Planetarium
7. Grianán of Aileach
8. Fanad Peninsula
9. Folk Village Museum
10. Gweebarra Bridge
11. The Rosses; Car Ferry to Aran Island
12. The Workhouse
13. Seat-of-Power Visitor Centre
14. Tory Island
15. Bloody Foreland
16. County Museum; Yeats Memorial Museum
17. Carrowmore Megalithic Cemetery; Tomb of Queen Maeve
18. Benbulben Mountain; Drumcliffe; Lissadel House
19. Ox Mountains
20. Carrowkeel Tombs
21. Culkin's Emigration Museum
22. Clough Oughter; Killykeen Forest Park
23. Black Pig's Dike
24. Cavan County Museum; Ramor Theatre
25. Parke's Castle; Monastery
26. Glens Centre; Leitrim Sculpture Gardens
27. St. Louis Convent Heritage Centre
28. Clones Abbey
29. Castle Leslie

NOT TO SCALE

The Northwest

Five counties make up this region, and there's a delightful variety of landscapes, from the rolling hills and lakes of **Cavan** and **Monaghan** in the east to the valleys of **Leitrim** and **Sligo** and the wild and wonderful **Donegal** in the west. Donegal and Sligo, and a narrow strip of Leitrim, are on the Atlantic coast, and the Shannon-Erne Waterway connects those two great rivers.

Only about 9% of the population of Ireland lives in these counties, so it's one of the quietest parts of the country, and in some places you can travel for miles without seeing another vehicle. The people are friendly and very welcoming to visitors. For visitor information, see www.irelandnorthwest.ie.

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IRELAND'S GREEN TOURISM

The **Green Box**, Ireland's first area-based integrated eco-tourism plan, is being developed by the Western Development Tourism Programme in partnership with the Organic Center, Rossinver, Co. Leitrim.

For more details, contact Alan Hill at the **Western Development Tourism Programme**, ☎ (071) 915-5323, alanhill@eircom.net; the **Western Development Commission**, Dillon House, Ballaghaderreen, Co. Roscommon, ☎ (094) 986-1441; or the **Organic Centre**, Rossinver, Co. Leitrim, ☎ (071) 985-4338; www.theorganiccentre.ie. You can also visit www.trueireland.com.

County Donegal

Slieve League Cliffs

Donegal is the fourth-largest county on the island and one of the most sparsely populated. It's also one of the most beautiful, with a coastline 400 miles (644 km) long, and many lakes and rivers, mountains and moors. Because of its lack of people, it looks much as it must have centuries ago. It also means that it is a very relaxing place to spend time.

Everywhere you go there are wonderful views, empty beaches, and charming little villages. Among its many interesting features are the **Slieve League** cliffs, the highest sea cliffs in Europe, and **Glenveagh National Park**. The county is famous worldwide for its tweed and for its distinctive Parian china.

The Donegal *Gaeltacht* (Irish-speaking region) is the largest in the country, and stretches from Fanad Head in North Donegal to Kilcar in the Southwest.

The county town is **Lifford**, the largest town is **Letterkenny** and other important towns include **Donegal Town**, **Ballybofey**, **Ballyshannon**, **Buncrana**, **Bundoran**, **Dungloe** and **Moville**.

◆ Getting Here

Letterkenny is served by major roads N13-N14-A5-N2 from Dublin (148 miles/238 km); and N13-N56-N15-N17 from Galway (160 miles/257 km). The town is very close to Strabane, Co. Tyrone, in Northern Ireland. The nearest railway station is in Derry City, and the closest ferry port is Larne.

There is a small airport at Carrickfin, Kincasslagh, on the coast north of Dungloe; ☎ (074) 954-8284; fax 954-8483; info@donegalairport.ie, www.donegalairport.ie.

◆ Tourist Information

The **Fáilte Ireland** office is on Derry Road, Letterkenny, and is open all year; ☎ (074) 912-1160; fax 912-5180; donegaltourism@eircom.net.

North West Tourism, Temple Street, Sligo. ☎ (071) 916-1201; fax 916-0360; www.irelandnorthwest.ie. Other year-round offices are in **Letterkenny**, ☎ (074) 912-1160; info@donegaldirect.ie, www.donegaldirect.ie, and **Donegal Town**, ☎ (074) 972-1148. Open in summer only are **Buncrana**, ☎ (074) 936-2600; **Bundoran**, ☎ (071) 984-2539; and **Dungloe**, ☎ (074) 952-1297.

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

Donegal Ancestry Centre, The Quay, Ramelton, ☎ (074) 915-1266; 915-1702; www.donegalancestry.com.

◆ Sightseeing

Letterkenny

The county's largest town is on the mouth of Lough Swilly, and makes an ideal base for touring both Donegal and Londonderry. It's welcoming and attractive, and you will sense an appreciation of the arts and heritage. People here seem relaxed and contented, quick to smile and exchange greetings, their accent soft and reminiscent of Derry not far away.

The town's **Main Street** is steep and there's a one-way traffic system, so explore on foot. The streets are full of character, with lots of interesting shops and pubs – some of them little changed for decades or more.

About halfway down Main Street there's a small square on the right with a bandstand, and an attractive sculpture remembering the Rabble Children. These were children, aged 11-16, whose services were sold by their parents for periods of six months to wealthy farmers in the Lagan Valley.

Among the other interesting sights are the two main bank buildings, the **AIB**, built in 1835, and the **Bank of Ireland**, dating from 1874. The **Library and Arts Centre** is on the corner of Main Street and Oliver Plunkett Road and is in the Old Literary Institute building. The **Courthouse**, still in use, was built in 1829.

1. Bus Station, Letterkenny Shopping Centre
2. An Grianán Theatre
3. Leisure Centre
4. Cinema
5. Court House
6. St. Eunan's Cathedral & Conwal Parish Church
7. Post Office
8. Market Square
9. Courtyard Shopping Centre
10. Library & Arts Centre
11. Oldtown Bridge
12. Old Town
13. Donegal County Museum
14. St. Conal's Hospital

The **County Museum** is on the High Road. It occupies part of what was the Warden's House of the Workhouse, which opened in 1843 and was in use until 1922. You can get a good idea of the history of Donegal from the museum's permanent collections; it also runs temporary exhibitions. Admission is free, and opening times are 10 am to

4:30 pm, Monday-Friday; closed from 12:30 to 1 pm for lunch; open 1 pm to 4:30 pm on Saturdays.

ENTERTAINMENT

An Grianán Theatre is on Port Road which leads onto Main Street and hosts touring shows and plays as well as producing its own excellent work. There's also a multi-screen **cinema** just below the shopping center.

ACTIVITIES

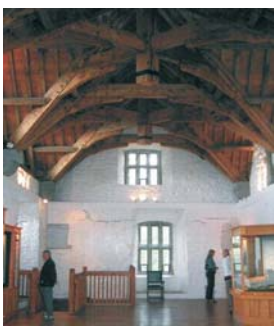
There are three parks in Letterkenny, so there's a choice for a pleasant walk. **Ballyraine Linear Park** is on the town's outskirts; the **Millennium Park** is a recent development at Ballyboe Park in the residential area; and the **Town Park** is at Hospital Roundabout (just after the museum).

Facilities at the **Leisure Centre** on High Road include swimming pools, steam room, sauna, fitness room. There are four courts at the Leisure Centre's Tennis Club. ☎ (074) 912-5251. On the Ramelton Road, the **Pitch-and-Putt** also has all-weather football pitches and American pool tables. ☎ (074) 912-1160. Nearby there's a **Karting Centre**, open 1 to 11 pm, Monday-Saturday, all year. ☎ (074) 912-9077.

Donegal Town

Donegal Town is in the southern part of the county, and dates back to the Vikings. It probably takes its name from *Dhún na nGall* – the fort of the foreigners – a reference to those invaders.

The town was the seat of the O'Donnells, who built the **Castle**. They also brought Franciscan monks; the ruins of the **Abbey**, dating from 1474, the same year as the Castle, are near the pier. In 1652 Brother Michael O'Cleary and three laymen wrote one of the most significant Irish history texts – *The Annals of the Four Masters*.



Donegal Castle's restored interior
(Andy Pryke)

The town's center is the **Diamond**, where the roads to Killybegs, Ballyshannon and Ballybofey meet. The Old Station House is now the **Donegal Railway Heritage Centre**, a museum, information cen-

ter and shop. Railways played a very important role in the lives of Donegal people, including for many the last experience of home as they traveled to the emigrant ships that took them across the Atlantic. The Heritage Centre is open daily, June-September, and on weekdays the rest of the year.

SHOPPING

Follow the Donegal Creative Craft Trail, visiting the studios and outlets of members of the guild called **Donegal Creative Crafts**, and you'll find plenty of original gifts and souvenirs. Ask at tourist offices for the free brochure.

Just outside Donegal Town, on the road to Ballyshannon and Sligo, is the **Donegal Craft Village**, which showcases the work of a number of talented artists. It's definitely worth stopping to take a look at examples of pottery, sculpture, wrought-iron furniture and jewelry. There's a coffee shop serving homemade produce. Opening times are 10 am to 6 pm, Monday-Saturday; in summer it's open on Sundays from noon. ☎ (074) 972-2225; donegalcraftvillage@donegal.net.

Touring Routes

There are a number of signposted routes you can follow, or just wander as you please around the marvelous countryside by bike or car.

THE INISHOWEN 100

This route takes you around the ***Inis Eoghan* Peninsula**. You can start on the N13 from Letterkenny, through Buncrana, Clonmany, Cardonagh, Malin Head, and back to Letterkenny via Greencastle, Moville and Muff. You will see some of the most desolately beautiful scenery as you head toward Malin, the country's most northerly point, passing through the **Gap of Mamore**. From Greencastle you can cross in about 10 minutes to Magilligan in Limavady, near the Giant's Causeway (see page 472). A drive-on ferry operates 363 days a year, with more than 30 crossings a day. This saves you driving 49 miles (79 km). ☎ (074) 938-1901, www.loughfoyleferry.com or info@loughfoyleferry.com.

Near Burt on the N13, at the top of a hill, there's an ancient round fort, the ***Grianán of Aileach***, or Stone House of the Sun. From here you can see five counties. Founded by Druids in 1700 BC, the fort was mentioned by the ancient geographer Ptolemy of Alexandria in Egypt.

1. 1600s Pier, Napoleonic Anchor
2. Donegal (O'Donnell) Castle
3. Donegal Railway Heritage Centre
4. Church of Ireland
5. Methodist Church
6. Presbyterian Church
7. Viewing Point
8. The Diamond, Obelisk to the Four Masters
9. St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church (Church of the Four Masters)
10. Famine Graveyard
11. Donegal Waterbus Office & Pier
12. Old Abbey & Cemetery
13. Donegal Craft Village; Picnic Area
14. Ballyboyle Island
15. Old Ship Booking & Embarking Point
16. Ruins of O'Boyle Castle
17. Old Coast Guard Station
18. The Hassans
19. Donegal Golf Club
20. Belle's Isle
21. Seal Island
22. Rooney's Island
23. St. Ernan's Island
24. Ruins of Magherabeg Abbey
25. Murvagh Beach

Grianán of Aileach

The Grianán of Aileach Centre, on the main Burt to Letterkenny road, is a great place to stop for a meal or snack as well as to find out more about the history of the area. The Centre is open all year – in summer from 10 am to 6 pm and in winter until 4 pm. During the tourist season there are Ulster Nights, with music, dance and poetry. ☎ (074) 936-8080, fax 936-8012; info@griananailigh.ie, www.griananailigh.ie.

Fanad Scenic Tour

Fanad Head Lighthouse

The Fanad Scenic Tour, just north of Letterkenny, takes you around the Fanad peninsula. Highlights include **Rathmullan**, marvelous views over **Ballymastocker Bay** and its lovely sandy beach, **Fanad Head** where there is a lighthouse, and **Kerrykeel**, where there is a dolmen and Knockalla Fort.

Ramelton is a very attractive little town. There has been a settlement here since the early Stone Age, about 7000 BC. From the 12th century, it was the seat of the O'Donnells, the area's ruling clan, who built a castle here in 1440. The Plantation of Ulster led to the arrival of Sir William Stewart, who built the first town, bringing Protestants, most of them from Scotland, to settle here. There's also an American connection. In 1682 the Reverend Francis Makemie, who grew up here, was ordained for the American missions and became known as "The Father of American Presbyterianism."

By the 18th century, Ramelton was at its most prosperous – a thriving market town with the biggest linen-bleaching works in the county. Ships from exotic ports unloaded their cargoes here. The **Grand**

Jury Rooms on Castle Street date from this time, as do the elegant houses, the tree-lined **Mall**, and the warehouses on the **Quay**.

The Ramelton Story collection at the Donegal Ancestry Centre is open from 10 am to 5:30 pm, April-September; October-March there is limited opening. ☎ (074) 915-1266. The Town Park on the riverbank has lovely walks to enjoy.

Rathmullan is a lovely little seaside village on the shore of Lough Swilly. It was from here, in 1607, that Ulster Chieftains O'Neill and O'Donnell left Ireland – an event called The Flight of the Earls. This is commemorated in the **Heritage Centre**, housed in an historic battery. Open from Easter to September, weekdays 10 am-5 pm; Sundays from noon. ☎ (074) 915-8178.

THE ATLANTIC DRIVE

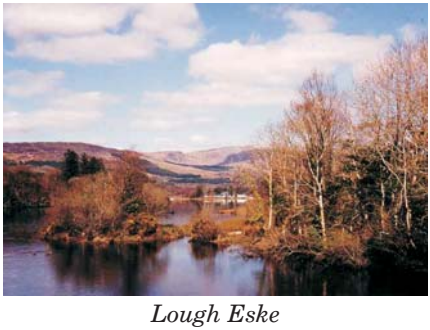
Doe Castle, Sheephaven Bay

The Atlantic Drive takes in Ramelton, then **Milford**, a game angling center, **Rosapenna** on the wonderful **Sheephaven Bay**, **Downings** with its sandy beach, and finally **Creeslough** and **Kilmacrennan**, which are also centers for game angling.

LOUGH ESKE DRIVE

From Donegal Town you can follow the Lough Eske Drive along the valley of the **Blue Stack Mountains** and enjoy terrific lakeside views.

From the town you can head west through Killybegs, a major fishing port, into Glencolumbkille.



Lough Eske

Folk Village, Glencolumbkille

The **Folk Village Museum** at **Glencolumbkille** was founded in 1967 by the inspirational priest Father James McDyer. Each house in the *clachan*, or village, is an exact replica, complete with furnishings and artifacts, of local dwellings from the 1700s, 1800s and 1900s. ☎ (074) 973-0017, fax 973-0334; folkvillage@eircom.net, www.glenfolkvillage.com.

After Glencolumbkille, you next go through the **Glengesh Pass** to Ardara and Glenties, crossing the Gweebarra Bridge into the Rosses and Dungloe. Following the Falcomb Coast Road takes you to Burtonport and the Gaeltacht and then Bunbeg and Gweedore, passing Bloody Foreland and Gortahork on the way to Dunfanaghy.

At Dunfanaghy you can visit **The Workhouse**, the scene of horrific suffering during the Great Famine (An Gorta Mhór) of 1845-1850. Open from mid-March to mid-October, 10 am to 5 pm, Monday-Saturday; from noon on Sundays. ☎ (074) 913-6540; janis@theirishfamine.com; www.theirishfamine.com.

COAST ROAD

An unforgettable way to arrive in the county from the south is to follow the Coast Road signs from Bundoran, a lovely seaside resort. They take you through Ballyshannon and Rossnowlagh to Donegal Town, and along the way you look out over the Atlantic.

Lifford

Lifford, the county town, is 15 miles (24 km) southeast of Letterkenny on the N14. It stands on the **River Finn**, which separates it from the much bigger town of Strabane, Co. Tyrone, in Northern Ireland.

The 18th-century courthouse now houses the **Seat of Power Visitor Centre**, with a craft shop and restaurant serving homemade food. Open all year, Monday-Friday from 9 am to 5 pm; Saturdays from 10 am and Sundays from 11:30 am. ☎ (074) 914-1733, fax 914-1228.

The attractive **Cavancor Historic House & Craft Centre**, just outside Lifford, is also worth visiting. It was the ancestral home of James Knox Polk, 11th President (1845-49) of the US. ☎ (074) 914-1143.

◆ Adventures

On Foot

WAYMARKED WAYS

There are two waymarked ways in the county: the Blue Stack Way and the *Bealach na Gaeltachta - Dhún na nGall* (Donegal Way). The **Blue Stack Way** starts in Donegal Town and takes you through the mountains of the same name to Glenties and Ardara (www.thebluestackway.com).

Bealach na Gaeltachta is made up of four circular long-distance routes passing through the Gaeltacht and the islands. Contact Gaelsaoire, ☎ toll-free within Ireland 1-800-621-600; info@gaelsaoire.ie; www.gaelsaoire.ie.

GLENVEAGH NATIONAL PARK & CASTLE

Glenveagh, on the eastern side of the **Derryveagh Mountains**, includes the county's highest mountains, **Errigal** and **Slieve Sneacht**, and in its southwestern end the cliffs called "the Poisoned Glen," which is a corruption of its name in Irish meaning "heavenly glen."

Errigal Mountain
(Andy Pryke)

Lough Veagh has natural stocks of salmon, char and brown trout. The Park is home to the largest herd of **red deer** in Europe, and there's lots of other wildlife to see, and hear. The **golden eagle**, which had become extinct here 100 years ago, was reintroduced in 2000.

It's worth recounting something of the estate's history. It was owned by the dreadful landlord John Adair, who in April 1861 evicted 244

Glenveagh National Park

tenants and cleared the land so his views of the landscape wouldn't be ruined!

Happily, it passed into the ownership of Henry McIlhenny from Philadelphia, who had made his fortune from Tabasco sauce. He created a celebrated garden around the 19th-century castle. In 1975 the Glenveagh estate was bought by the State, and in 1981 he very generously presented the castle and gardens to the Irish people. Allow three to four hours for your visit. Admission free, but access to Castle is by guided tour only. Open mid-March to early November, daily, 10 am to 6:30 pm; ☎ (074) 37090; www.heritageireland.ie.

AROUND DONEGAL TOWN

There are organized walking tours of the town and of the nearby hills. ☎ (087) 266-2248; www.northwestwalkingguides.com, info@northwestwalkingguides.com.

You can also take an interesting stroll along the **Bank Walk** in the town, which follows the west bank of the River Eske for a mile and a half, with lovely views. You cross Boyce's Bridge on the Killybegs Road and join the walk on the left, just past the stone bridge on the Mountcharles Road.

Six miles (9.7 km) from Donegal Town, on the Ballybofey Road, you can climb either of the two peaks of Barnesmore in the **Blue Stack Mountains**. You can relax afterwards at Biddy O'Barnes, a pub that has welcomed travelers for years.

WALKING VACATIONS & FESTIVALS

Donegal is a great destination for anyone who enjoys walking, but you don't have to do all the planning yourself – take a look at the Fáilte Ireland Web site for inclusive short breaks and vacations, www.irelandnorthwest.ie

You will also find information there about the three annual festivals: **Ardara Walking Festival**, **Hills of Donegal Walking Festival**, and the **Donegal International Walking Festival**.

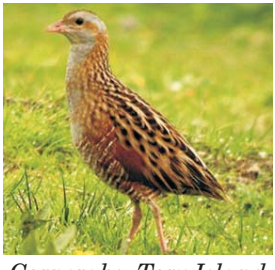
On Water

A pleasant and relaxing way of seeing many of the interesting sites around Donegal Town is to take the Waterbus. Among the places you pass is the **Embarkation Point**, from where emigrants left for Canada and the US during the famine years of 1845-47, and **Seal Island**, which is home to 200 seals. Get details from ☎ (074) 972-3666.

Discovering the Islands

Arranmore Island is only 20 minutes by drive-on ferry from Burtonport (ferry runs every hour during summer), ☎ (074) 952-1532.

Tory Island, 11 miles (17.7 km) off the northwest coast, is Europe's most northwesterly point, treeless and only three miles (4.8 km) wide by one mile long. It has been inhabited since Neolithic times, 4,000 years ago. **St. Columcille** founded a monastery here in the 6th century.



Corncrake, Tory Island
(Paul Kelly)

Tory Ferry Services, ☎ (074) 953-1320. There's also a Dive Centre on Tory Island, ☎ (074) 913-5282, dive@toryhotel.com, www.toryhotel.com.

FISHING

The **Northern Regional Fisheries Board** is the authority responsible for the area. Contact them at Station Road, Ballyshannon, ☎ (071) 985-1435; fax 985-1816; www.nrfb.ie.

There are guides to fishing available from tourist offices and here, as with everywhere else in Ireland, local tackle and bait outlets will also give visitors advice.

Sea angling is so popular in Donegal that there are a number of annual festivals, all open to visitors. In May they are at Downings and

Rathmullan, at Culdaff in June, Gweedore in July, at Killybegs and Moville during August and at Malin in September. The simplest way to find out about them, and about boat charters, is to call **North West Tourism** (based in Sligo; see page 399).

DIVING

The Donegal coastline has lots of beautiful and spectacular sites for deep-sea diving. Check with tourist bureau for details.

On Horseback

Homefield Equestrian Centre, Bundoran, March 17 to late October; homefield@indigo.ie; www.homefieldhouse.com.

Ashtree Stables, Coole, Cranford, overlook Multroy Bay, ☎ (074) 915-3312

Golden Sands, Rathmullan, ☎ (074) 915-8124

Five Oaks Ranch, for Western Style Riding on imported American horses, open all year. ☎ +353 (071) 985-1030; fiveoaksranch@eircom.net

Carrigart, Cranford, ☎ (074) 915-3583

RIDE ON AN OPEN FARM

The **Deane Open Farm** is 12 miles (19 km) west of Donegal Town on the N56 to Killybegs. The 100-acre farm, looking out over Bruckless Bay, has belonged to the Deane family since 1790. You can feed, nurse and walk animals, large and small, take a tour of the farm or just walk in the forest. It's open for visits from April to September, 10 am to 4 pm. Riding is available all year, and pitch-and-putt from April to October, 9 am to 9 pm. ☎ (074) 973-7160; deanequestrian@eircom.net.

Irish language and cultural activity tours for adults are available in Co. Donegal, with separate courses in hill-walking, archaeology, painting, pottery, the bodhrán, the flute, dancing, the environment and culture. Contact Oideas Gael *in Glencolumbkille. ☎ (074) 973-0248; oideasgael@eircom.net; www.Oideas-Gael.com.*

◆ Golf

All the golf courses are in scenic areas, and they do welcome visitors, but phone in advance.

Links Courses on the Atlantic

- **North West Golf Club**, Lisfannon, near Buncrana, ☎ (086) 604-7299
- **Ballyliffin Golf Club** has two, the Old Links and Glasheady, ☎ (074) 937-6119
- **Dunfanaghy**, ☎ (074) 913-6335
- **Rosapenna**, ☎ (074) 915-5301
- **Portsalon**, ☎ (074) 915-9459
- **St. Patrick's Golf Club**, Carrigart, ☎ (074) 915-5114
- **Bundoran**, ☎ (072) 984-1302
- **Donegal Golf Club**, Murvagh, ☎ (074) 973-4054
- **Narin & Portnoo**, ☎ (074) 954-5107

Other Courses

- **Letterkenny**, at Barnhill, on the shores of Lough Swilly, ☎ (074) 912-1150
- **Ballybofey and Stranorlar**, with views of Finn Valley, ☎ (074) 913-1093
- **Cruit Island Golf Club**, nine-hole course on island connected to mainland by bridge, near Dungloe, ☎ (074) 954-3296

◆ Where to Stay

For accommodations pricing guide, see page 393.

Hotels

☆☆☆ **The Letterkenny Court Hotel**, at 29-45 Main Street, Letterkenny, is welcoming and comfortable, with charming and efficient staff. It has 83 spacious guest rooms, of which 25 are apartment-style suites. The hotel's **Gallery Bistro** is influenced by the traditional American family steakhouse, and also serves dishes from around the world. **Dillon's Bar** serves coffee, carvery lunch, and bar food until 10 pm, and has a delicatessen section. Direct, ☎ (074) 912-2977; www.choiceho-

telsireland.ie. The hotel belongs to the marketing group Irish Court Hotels. They offer a great value room-only rate and two-night packages; ☎ (074) 912-2977; info@letterkennycourthotel.ie. Central reservations for Irish Court Hotels, ☎ (065) 684-3888; stay@irishcourthotels.com, www.irishcourthotels.com.

☆☆☆ **Arnolds Hotel** is at the entrance to the picturesque village of Dunfanaghy, on the shore of Sheephaven Bay, and has welcomed guests since 1922. Some of its 30 bedrooms have panoramic views of Donegal Bay and Horn Head; others look out on mature gardens.

There's a riding stable on site, which caters to all levels of experience; there's also a putting green and croquet lawn. Special activities offered include painting, wildlife, creative writing, photography, fishing, walking. Guests can relax in the **Whiskey Fly Bar** or in the **Glenveagh Room**, with its open fire. There's a choice of where to eat. **The Garden Bistro**'s menu includes seafood and vegetarian choices, served with a selection of fine wines. **The Tramore Restaurant** serves good food in elegant surroundings. Rates from $$. ☎ (074) 913-6208; fax 913-6352; arnoldshotel@eircom.net; www.arnoldshotel.com.

☆☆☆ **The Mill Park Hotel** is a short walk from the middle of Donegal Town on the Killybegs road, and has a welcoming atmosphere with open fires. Each of its 40 bedrooms and three suites is individually decorated. There's a Leisure Club, with pool and gym and Wellness Centre offering variety of treatments; info@millparkhotel.com. Local produce is always included on the hotel menu. The Mill Park belongs to the Irish Country Hotels marketing group. Rates from $$. ☎ (074) 91972-2880; fax 972-2640; millparkhotel@eircom.net; www.millparkhotel.com.

☆☆☆ **The Highlands Hotel** is at Glenties, and is known for its welcoming atmosphere and good food. It's family-run and has 25 bedrooms, with special golf discount packages offered. Rates from $. ☎ (074) 955-1111; fax 955-1564; highlandshotel@eircom.net; www.thehighlandshotel.com.

☆☆ **The Ballyliffin Hotel** is in the pretty village of Ballyliffin at Clonmany on the beautiful Inishowen peninsula, a short walk from Pollan Bay and its long beach. It's family-run and friendly, with a choice of dining options. Rates from $$. ☎ (074) 937-6106; fax 937-6658; info@ballyliffinhotel.com; www.ballyliffinhotel.com.

Cottages for Rent

☆☆☆☆ **Donegal Thatched Cottages**, Cruit Island, Kincasslagh, are on the sea, with a sandy beach, on an island connected to the mainland by a bridge. ☎ (071) 917-7197; info@donegalthatchedcottages.com; www.donegalthatchedcottages.com.

☆☆☆ to ☆☆☆☆ **Bunbeg Holiday Homes** are on the coast, on the R258 west of Gweedore in northwest Donegal. ☎ (074) 953-1401; fax 953-2749; info@bunbegholidayhomes.com; www.bunbegholidayhomes.com.

Camping & RV Parks

☆☆☆☆ **Knockalla Park** is near Portsalon, and is open mid-March to mid-September. There's a shop on site, and mobile homes for rent. ☎ (074) 915-9108.

☆☆ **Casey's Park** is on the edge of Sheephaven Bay in Downings, beside a mile-long sandy beach. It's open April 1 to September 30. ☎ (074) 915-5301; rosapenna@eircom.net.

☆☆☆☆ **Lakeside Centre Caravan and Camping Park** is five minutes on foot from Ballyshannon, on the shore of Assaroe Lake. Facilities include game and coarse angling on the lake and go-karts for hire. The park is open mid-March to September 30. ☎ (072) 985-2822; lakesidecentre@eircom.net; www.donegalbay.com/lakeside.

Hostels

There are eight members of Independent Holiday Hostels of Ireland in Co. Donegal, ☎ (01) 836-4700; fax 836-4710; info@hostels-ireland.com; www.hostels-ireland.com.

◆ Where to Eat

McGrory's of Culdaff on the Inishowen Peninsula is a restaurant, bar, guesthouse and music venue that first opened in 1924. It's still a family business. Its three-star guesthouse has 10 bedrooms. Rates from $, with special offers for longer stays. Food is available in **The Front Bar**, where Irish traditional music is performed, and **Mac's Backroom Bar** is noted as an entertainment venue. ☎ (074) 937-9104; fax 937-9235; mcgr@tinet.ie; www.mcgrorys.ie.

Galfees Food Emporium is a delicatessen/bistro on Upper Main Street, Letterkenny, where you can have anything from a freshly made sandwich to a full meal. They also sell prepared foods; open 9 am to 8 pm. ☎ (074) 912-8535; www.galfees.net.

The Forge Restaurant and Guesthouse, in an attractive stone building, is three miles from Rossnowlagh beach and three miles from Ballyshannon. Rates from $ overnight, with special weekend offers. Open for lunch every day from 1:30-3 pm and for dinner from 6-9:30 pm. ☎ (071) 982-2070; fax 982-2075; theforgeguesthouse@eircom.net; www.theforgeguesthouse.com.

The Arch Inn, Carndonagh, on the Inishowen Peninsula, is a pleasant place where you can relax by an open fire. Despite its attractive traditional setting, the menu is up-to-date and cosmopolitan. ☎ (074) 937-3029.

County Sligo

Sligo is one of the Republic's smaller counties, and has a spectacular Atlantic coastline stretching from the seaside village of **Mullaghmore** in the north to **Enniscrone** in the west, with beautiful beaches, and dramatic seas, popular with surfers.

Benbulben Head

Inland, it also has wonderful scenery, with unusually shaped hills rising from steep valleys, the most noticeable hill being **Benbulben**. The scenic **Ox Mountains** are here, and the county's main rivers are the **Moy** and **Owengarve**. The largest lakes are **Lough Gill**, **Lough**

Arrow, and **Lough Gara**. The countryside is perfect for walking or fishing, or for just wandering around and enjoying the pretty villages nestling under the mountains or along lakeshores.

The surname **Yeats** is synonymous with Sligo; the poet William Butler Yeats wrote about it, and his brother Jack used to say he never painted a picture without thinking about the area.

There is much evidence of the past scattered around, especially at **Carrowmore**, close to Sligo Town, where over 30 tombs make up a huge Stone Age cemetery. Despite its beauty and the range of activities it offers, Sligo remains relatively undiscovered by tourists.

The county capital and largest town is **Sligo Town**, and other main towns include **Ballymote**, **Grange** and **Tubbercurry**.

◆ Tourist Information

North West Tourism, Temple Street, Sligo. ☎ (071) 916-1201; fax 916-0360; www.irelandnorthwest.ie.

◆ Getting Here

Sligo Town is on N17-N4 from Dublin (135 miles/217 km); N15-N16-A4-M1-A3-M1 from Belfast (130 miles/209 km); N17 from Galway (86 miles/138 km).

Sligo has a rail station, ☎ (071) 916-9888, and a bus station, ☎ (071) 916-0066. Sligo Airport is at Strandhill nearby. ☎ (071) 916-8280; www.sligoairport.com.

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

County Sligo Heritage and Genealogy Centre, Áras Reddan, Temple Street, Sligo. ☎ (071) 914-3728; www.sligoroots.com, info@sligoroots.com.

◆ Sightseeing

Sligo Town

During the 18th century the town began to prosper as a trading port, and the Metal Man at Rosses Point, at the entrance to Sligo Harbor, is a reminder of those days. Sligo Bay's Man is one of four made by Thomas Kirke in England in 1819; it points out the safest channel for shipping. The Sligo Bay Man, dressed in the uniform of a Royal Navy Petty Officer, is 12 feet tall and stands with his arm outstretched.

During and after the Great Famine about 50,000 people emigrated from here. The port declined toward the end of the 19th century, but today the town is attractive, full of life, with lots of traditional shopfronts, pubs, and places to eat. There are modern developments too but, unlike some other towns, modernization has been carried out very carefully here, with the old and new complementing each other.

Take at least a short walk around. There are, of course, many signs in the town of associations with Yeats, considered Ireland's greatest poet, who spent much of his childhood here and was inspired by his surroundings. There's an eye-catching statue of him by Rowan Gillespie in the center of the town. Across the river from Sligo Abbey is the **Yeats Memorial Building**, which houses the **County Museum** and the **Yeats Memorial Museum**. Just down the road at **Douglas Hyde Bridge** is the headquarters of the Yeats Society, venue for the annual Yeats International Summer School.

The **Model Arts Centre** is a short walk away from the town center on the Mall. It's one of the most attractive galleries I've ever seen, with plenty of natural light. Here you can see paintings by Jack Yeats, brother of the poet, as well as the exhibitions of work by contemporary artists. Open year-round, Tuesday to Sunday; ☎ (071) 914-1405; www.modelart.ie.

The **Hawk's Well Theatre**, three minutes walk from the town center, has a year-round program that includes drama, dance, classical and traditional music. ☎ (071) 916-1526.

◆ A Coastal Tour

Head north out of Sligo on the N15 to **Rosses Point**, three miles (4.8 km) away, an absolutely beautiful resort with magnificent beaches. A mile farther and you're at **Drumcliffe**, dominated by the mighty **Benbulben Mountain**, towering above the landscape at 1,730 feet (750 m).

The **Church & Visitor Centre** here is worth a stop. Yeats is buried here; it's on the site of a monastery founded in 574 by Columcille, and it's where one of the most important battles in Irish history took place between the High King and the leaders of the Northern O'Neills. Open daily all year. ☎ (071) 914-4956; info@drumcliffe.ie; www.drumcliffe.ie.

On a minor road two miles (3.2 km) from here is **Lissadell House**, home of the Gore-Booths, friends of Yeats. Two daughters were involved in the 1916 Rising, and one, Constance Markiewicz, was condemned to death. She survived to become the first female Member of Parliament in England, and later Minister for Labour in the first *Dáil* (Irish Parliament). The house is open daily, mid-March to late September, 11 am to 6 pm, last tour at 5pm. ☎ (071) 916-3150; info@lissadellhouse.com, www.lissadellhouse.com.

EPITAPH OF WB YEATS AT DRUMCLIFF

Under bare Ben Bulben's head
In Drumcliff churchyard Yeats is laid.
An ancestor was rector there
Long years ago, a church stands near,
By the road an ancient cross.
No marble, no conventional phrase;
On limestone quarried near the spot
By his command these words are cut:
Cast a cold eye
On life, on death.
Horseman, pass by!

Near Sligo Town

The **Carrowmore Megalithic Cemetery** is just south of town, so near that you can walk to it. It's open daily from Easter to October, 10 am-6 pm. ☎ (071) 916-1534.

Carrowmore

Nearby is **Strandhill**, where the lovely sandy beach seems to go on forever. The Knochnarea Mountain forms a lovely backdrop for the huge waves. Over 1,000 feet high (231 m), at the top of Knocknarea is the tomb of Maeve, Queen of Connacht, and if you have the energy it's worth the climb for the fantastic view of five counties.

◆ Inland

If you arrive in Sligo from the Roscommon direction, the road runs through a pass on the Curlew Mountains and looks down onto Lough Arrow, passing through Ballinafad. This part of the county is worth exploring. You turn onto the minor road marked Ballymote and climb over the Bricklieve Mountains. Take care when you follow the signpost to the **Carrowkeel Passage Tombs,** as it's frighteningly steep and a track rather than a road. There is a place to park, and walk from there. The Stone Age tombs are spread out over the hillside and you can just about stand up in the tallest of them.

After that, you come to **Ballymore**, a sweet little village with an old church on top of a hill. Follow the signs for **Templehouse Lake**, where you could rent a boat or fish.

Next, head for **Tubbercurry**, and on the way you see Knocknashee, another flat-topped mountain like Benbulben. Tubbercurry is on the N17 to Galway, and is a busy market town, nestling at the foot of the **Ox Mountains**. It's the home of an amateur drama festival and also hosts a summer school in traditional music. It has lots of pubs, and a choice of guesthouses.

There's a choice of roads up into the Ox Mountains; head for the villages of **Clonacool** and **Carrowneden**, four miles (6.4 km) apart. On the way, you'll pass through wonderful scenery, see rushing streams and drive through woods. On the other side of a pass is the valley called **Ladies Brae**. Driving downhill, you see laid out before you a great sweep of green fields.

At the T-junction, turn left and left again at the main road to go to **Dromore West**, and continue on until you come to the third crossroads where there's a sign for **Culkin's Emigration Museum**. It's in a little shop that was the Shipping and Emigration Agency years ago, and there's a fascinating collection of memorabilia. From June to September they serve tea and homemade scones.

Return from there to Dromore West and take the coast road to **Easkey**, popular with surfers.

◆ Yeats Trail

The signposted Yeats Trail takes you from Sligo to Dublin, visiting places associated with the two brothers, the poet and playwright William and the painter Jack. You can get a "passport," entitling you to a discount on entry charges, from North West Tourism in Sligo. It houses the Museum, Memorial Building, Model Arts and oversees Drumcliffe, out of town on the N15, where Yeats is buried. It also includes Lissadell House. North West Tourism & Cultural Centre.

W.B. Yeats

◆ South of Town

Continuing along the coast from Easkey you come to **Enniscrone**, which is on the eastern shore of Killala Bay, facing Mayo, off the N59, 30 miles (48 km) from Sligo. It has a three-mile-long sheltered beach, with fantastic views out into the Atlantic.

It's also the home of **Kilcullen's Bath House**, which has been offering seaweed baths since 1912. The beautiful Edwardian building, now has a special charm, with its enormous glazed porcelain baths, solid brass taps and paneled wooden shower cisterns. Seaweed baths are recommended for those suffering from ailments like arthritis and rheumatism. They also offer steam health baths. Open daily year-round, phone for hours. ☎ (096) 36238. Also at Enniscrone is **Waterpoint**, an indoor water recreation facility. ☎ (096) 36999. Details of these and other activities on www.westsligo.com.

◆ Adventures

On Foot

IN SLIGO TOWN

There's a signposted walking trail in Sligo Town, which starts in Stephen Street. You can get the accompanying booklet, *A Walking Trail & Pictorial Town Map of Sligo*, at the tourist office in Temple Street, ☎ (071) 916-1201.

LONG-DISTANCE WALK

The **Sligo Way** is a long-distance (46 miles/74 kn) waymarked way. It starts at Lough Talt and ends in Dromahair. More details from ☎ (071) 915-6666; www.walkireland.ie.

FOREST WALKS

Union Wood, five miles (eight km) south of Sligo, on the Ballygawley Road, used to be part of an old estate and has three miles (4.8 km) of forest roads.

At Half Moon Bay, less than two miles (3.2 km) from Sligo, is the **Hazelwood Demesne**, on the shores of Lough Gill. There's a choice of trails, all clearly marked, and as you walk you pass a unique series of outdoor sculptures by Irish and international artists.

In & On the Water

BEACHES & SURFING

There are Blue Flag beaches at Mullaghmore, Rosses Point and Enniscrone.

The best surfing locations on Sligo's coast are at **Enniscrone**, **Easkey**, **Aughris**, **Mullaghmore** and **Strandhill**.

- **Perfect Day Surf Shop & School**, Strandhill, ☎ (071) 912-8488, www.perfectdaysurfing.com, info@perfectdaysurfing.com
- **Surf and Information Centre**, Easkey, is also the contact for the Irish Surfing Association. Call for surf reports; ☎ (096) 49428; www.isasurf.ie

DIVING

Mullaghmore Harbour

The **Harbour View Dive Centre** at Mullaghmore offers PADI open-water courses, gear rental and a dive shop. See their Web site for details. They also offer B&B style accommodation; contact Danny or Attracta Boyle, ☎/fax (071) 916-6366; www.club.ie/firstsite/sligo, harbourview-sligo@eircom.net.

BOATING

Lough Ree Power Boat School runs lessons at Rosses Point. ☎ 1 890 704 090; funcourse@hodsonbay.com; www.hodsonbay.com.

FISHING

Sligo is a great county for fishing, with so many lakes and rivers, as well as its long coastline. The local tourist office will give advice, as will many of the accommodation providers.

Lough Gill has stocks of spring salmon and brown trout, and is also popular for coarse fishing. Boats and a ghillie (guide) service are offered at ☎ (071) 914-1462.

The western seaboard attracts many species of sea fish, drawing keen shore and sea anglers to Sligo each year. Fully equipped sea-angling boats can be rented at Rosses Point and Mullaghmore.

SCENIC TOUR

Take a Wild Rose Waterbus tour of Lough Gill, which includes the **Lake Isle of Innisfree**, made famous by Yeats in his poem by that title. ☎ (071) 916-4266.

On Horseback

Woodlands Equestrian Centre, Loughill, Lavagh, Tubbercurry offers trekking through woods and farmland on home-bred ponies. ☎ (071) 918-4207. Other places where you can ride include:

- **Ard Chuan Equestrian Centre**, Corballa. ☎ (096) 45084
- **Markree Castle Riding Stables**, Collooney. ☎ (071) 913-0092
- **Sligo Riding Centre**, Carrowmore. ☎ (071) 916-1353

Sligo Racecourse is in one of the most scenic settings in the country, just outside the town. ☎ (071) 918-3342.

◆ Golf

There are three classic links courses, all around Sligo Bay, with wonderful views of the sea. The **County Sligo Golf Club**, Rosses Point,

was founded in 1894. ☎ (071) 917-7186. **Enniscrone Golf Club** is at ☎ (096) 36297. **Strandhill Golf Club** has views of the Ox Mountains on one side and Benbulben on the other. ☎ (071) 916-8188. There's a new 9-hole course at **Tubbercurry**, ☎ (071) 918-5849.

◆ Where to Stay

For accommodations pricing guide, see page 393.

Hotels

☆☆☆ The **Sligo Park Hotel** on the edge of the town is bright and contemporary, set in seven acres of parkland. There are 138 bedrooms. There is a leisure center, with pool, sauna, Jacuzzi and gym, plus a bar and restaurant that are popular with locals, and staff can arrange activities for guests. The hotel's **Hazelwood Restaurant** offers wholesome food prepared using fine local ingredients, and carvery lunch is available in the **Rathanna Bar**. Rates from $$. ☎ (071) 919-0400; fax 916-9556; sligo@leehotels.com; www.leehotels.com.

☆☆ **The Pier Head Hotel** is in the seaside village of Mullaghmore. It has a choice of bars, good food in its Atlantis Restaurant; a leisure center with pool and gym, and an outdoor hot tub with marvellous views. Surfing and equestrian activities, fishing and a tennis court are available. Excellent value, rates from $$ with special packages. ☎ (071) 916-6171; fax 916-6473; pierhead@eircom.net; www.pierheadhotel.com.

☆☆☆ **Ocean View Hotel**, Strandhill, overlooks the Atlantic and nestles at the foot of Knocknarea Mountain. It's friendly and family-run, with only 13 bedrooms, a restaurant and café bar. Closed from mid-December to March 1. From $. ☎ (071) 916-8115; fax 916-8009; oceanviewhotel@eircom.net, www.homepage.tinet.ie/~oceanview.

☆☆☆ **The Southern Hotel and Leisure Center**, a member of the Brian McEniff Hotel Group, is in the center of Sligo Town and retains a historic atmosphere while offering guests modern facilities, including a swimming pool. It has 100 bedrooms, bar and restaurant, and in the summer there's entertainment almost every evening. Rates $$. ☎ (071) 916-2101; fax 916-0328; Lo-call 1850-520-052 in the Republic or 0800-783-9024 from Northern Ireland or the UK; reservations@sligosouthernhotel.com; www.sligosouthernhotel.com.

Rentals & Hostels

North West Tourism has a central self-catering and reservation unit, covering counties Donegal, Leitrim, Monaghan and Cavan, as well as Sligo. ☎ (071) 916-1201; in Ireland 1-850-200-555.

Eden Hill. ☎ (071) 914-3204; edenhillhostel@eircom.net

Harbour House. ☎ (071) 917-1547; harbourhouse@eircom.net

White House Hostel. ☎ (071) 914-5160

Camping & RV Parks

☆☆☆☆ **Greenlands Caravan and Camping Park**, Rosses Point, open mid-April to mid-September. ☎ (071) 917-7113.

☆☆☆ **Strandhill Park** is at Strandhill Beach, which attracts surfers from all over the world, and has miles of sand dunes to walk in. It's open mid-April-end September. ☎ (071) 916-8111.

☆☆ **Atlantic Park**, Enniscrone, open March 1-September 30. ☎ (096) 36132.

☆☆ **Lough Arrow Touring Caravan Park**, Ballynary, Riverstown, close to the Rockview Hotel, with its bar and restaurant and is open April 1-October 31. ☎ (071) 966-6018; www.rockviewhotel.com/campsite.

◆ Where to Eat

There are lots of places to eat in Sligo and other towns, including pubs, cafés, restaurants and fast food outlets.

The Embassy Rooms Restaurant is on the banks of the river Garavogue, on John F. Kennedy Parade in Sligo Town, and opens at 10:30 am every day with lunch from 12:30-2:45 and evening meals available from 6-10 pm. There's an early-bird menu from 5:30-7:30, Monday to Friday, which is a great value. Lunch can be enjoyed in a choice of two lounges or in **The Belfry Bar**. ☎ (071) 916-1250; fax 916-0649; kevo@eircom.net.

Riverbank Restaurant, Rockwood Parade, also on river in the center of Sligo, offers excellent value. Open Monday to Saturday from 9am, until 7pm Monday-Wednesday and until 9.30pm from Thursday-Saturday. ☎ (071) 917-1097; riverbankrestaurant@eircom.net.

Yeats Tavern Restaurant & Davis's Pub at Drumcliffe serves traditional Irish, international, seafood and vegetarian dishes. Monday to Saturday, 12:30 to 9.45pm; Sunday 12:30 to 2.30pm and 4pm-9.45pm. ☎ (071) 916-3117.

Nearby is the **Drumcliffe Tea House & Craft Shop**, offering good wholesome food, home-made cakes and desserts. You can enjoy a glass of wine with food. Books and crafts to buy. ☎ (071) 914-4956; drumcliffeteahouse@eircom.net.

County Cavan

The inland county of Cavan is quite small, its area only 730 square miles (1,898 square km). Its name comes appropriately from the Irish word cabhán, meaning "a hollow," as it is set between highlands in the east and the Erne Valley and a mountainous region on the west.

The county is said to have 365 lakes, one for each day of the year, and the largest of them are **Lough Gowna**, **Lough Oughter**, **Lough Sheelin**, and **Lough Ramor**. Its main rivers are the **Shannon**, **Erne**, **Blackwater** and **Annalee**.

The **Shannon-Erne Waterway** links these two rivers, which spring from the barren Cuilcagh Mountains in the county's northwest. The source of the Shannon, the longest river in Ireland, is known as the Shannon Pot and is just a few miles north of Dowra.

You can't fail to notice the number of ancient monuments and ruins wherever you go. The landscape is dotted with megalithic tombs – 59 of them. The most interesting are the double court tomb dating from 3000-2500 BC at **Cohaw** and the **Duffcastle Dolmen**.

There are at least 100 **crannógs** (from *crann*, meaning timber or tree) in the county. They are dwellings made of mud, stones and wood, set on small natural or man-made islands and surrounded by palisades. Each was used as a refuge for a family and it's cattle, and they date from the Stone Age through the late medieval period. In other parts of the country you see replicas of crannógs in folk parks; here they are authentic.

A fortification, dating back to about 500 BC, known as **The Black Pig's Dyke**, which divided the ancient province of Ulster from the rest of the island, emerges here near Dowra.

The county town is also called **Cavan**, and other main towns are **Cootehill**, **Baileboro**, **Kingscourt**, **Belturbet** and **Virginia**.

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

The **County Cavan Heritage & Genealogical Research Centre** offers a full genealogical research service for people with Cavan ancestry. Contact Cana House, Farnham Street, Cavan. ☎ (049) 436-1094; 433-1494; gen@cavangenealogy.com; www.cavangenealogy.com.

◆ Getting Here

Cavan Town is served by major routes N3 from Dublin (67 miles/108 km); N3-N54-N2-A3-M1 from Belfast (88 miles/142 km); N3-N5-N6-N18 from Galway (103 miles/166 km); and N55-N6-N62-N8-N25 from Cork (187 miles/301 km).

It has a bus station, ☎ (049) 433-1353. The nearest rail station is in Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim, and the closest airport and seaport are in Dublin.

◆ Tourist Information

Fáilte Ireland Tourist Information Office, Farnham Street, Cavan, is open March-October, ☎ (049) 433-1942.

◆ Sightseeing

Cavan Town

The county town is a pleasant place to visit. Its name, meaning "hollow," suits the town as much as it does the county, as it is surrounded by hills.

This area was the stronghold of the O'Reillys whose castle, **Clough Oughter**, now in ruins, can be seen standing on an island in Lough Oughter, a mile outside town. The town grew up around the **abbey**, which dates from 1300.

Cavan Cathedral

Cavan has the distinction of being the only medieval town in Ireland founded by the Irish themselves, and its narrow streets still follow the same pattern that was set down seven centuries ago.

A local landlord family, the Farnhams, improved Cavan in the early 19th century. They built a new street that still bears the family name, lined with townhouses and public buildings such as churches and the courthouse, built in 1825. In the late 19th century, Cavan became an important rail junction between the midland and western lines and those of the Northern Railways.

Attractions include **Cavan Crystal**, the second-oldest lead crystal factory (after Waterford) in Ireland; and the **Lifeforce Mill**, where part of the visit is spent making a loaf of bread.

The town of Virginia, 19 miles (31 km) southeast of Cavan on the N3, at the edge of Lough Ramor, is pleasantly laid out, with some pretty cottages on its main street. On the lakeshore there's a sandy stretch where you can swim, and there are boats to hire. The **Ramor Theatre** hosts touring and local productions, ☎ (049) 854-7074.

The **Cavan County Museum** is at Ballyjamesduff in an attractive 19th-century building on lovely grounds. It's worth the trip to see the Pighouse Collection, which includes material from the 18th through the 20th centuries. It also has a craft shop and tea room. Open Tuesday-Saturday, 10 am to 5 pm; Sundays from June to October, 2-6 pm. ☎ (049) 854-4070, www.cavanmuseum.com.

For all you trivia buffs out there, Marcus Daly, who became a mining tycoon in the US, was born in Ballyjamesduff in 1841, and emigrated in 1856. He later founded the city of Anaconda in Montana.

WALKING TOURS

Maudabawn Cultural Centre, Cootehill, is worth visiting. It houses displays and an audiovisual presentation on the area's history and has a database of sites you can view on PC. Tours, cultural weekends and summer school visits can be arranged. The centre has a gift shop and snacks are available. Phone for opening times. They will also organize guided heritage tours of both Co. Cavan and Co.

Monaghan (from two-hour, half-day, and full-day tours), and summer school courses on Ireland's culture and history. ☎ (049) 555-9540.

◆ Adventures

On Foot

LONG-DISTANCE WALK

The **Cavan Way** is a waymarked walking route through the pleasant hills and valleys of the county. It's 16 miles (26 km) long and stretches from Blacklion to Dowra. The source of the Shannon lies just off the route, and walkers meet the river itself on the descent into Dowra. ☎ (049) 952-6121.

FOREST PARKS

Killykeen Forest Park surrounds the lake and islands of Lough Oughter, near Cavan. There are a number of marked trails. The park contains sites of historical interest, including an Iron Age ring fort and Clogh Oughter Castle. The forest park is ideal for walking and cycling, with bikes and boats available for hire. ☎ (049) 433-2541.

Dun-Na-Ri Forest Park is a mile north of Kingscourt on the R179, in a peaceful glen on the banks of the River Cabra. All trails are signposted. Details of both of these parks are on www.coillte.ie.

On Water

Boats are available for hire in the Killykeen Forest Park, where canoeing, windsurfing and other watersports can also be enjoyed on Lough Oughter. The complex remains open all year, but some facilities are seasonal, so phone to check. ☎ (049) 433-2541.

With the **Shannon-Erne Waterway** linking those two great rivers, there are 186 miles (300 km) of navigable waterway, ideal for cruising.

FISHING

Lough Oughter is renowned for coarse angling. A pegged stretch, where international competitions are held, is located within the Killykeen Forest Park. There are many fine game angling river stretches and wild brown trout lake fisheries; the county also has a great reputation for its coarse and pike fishing. Almost every town seems to be an angling

center. Local festivals are held annually at Arvagh, Belturbet and Cootehill, with one-day open matches at many centers.

The **Central Regional Fisheries Board** is the authority responsible for Cavan, The Central Fisheries Board, Unit 4, Swords Business Campus, Balheary Road, Swords, Co. Dublin; info@cfb.ie, www.cfb.ie.

TACKLE SHOPS

McM Sports, Killeshandra. ☎ (049) 433-4438

Joe Mulligan, Shercock, ☎ (042) 966-9184

Sports World, Townhall Street, Cavan, ☎ (049) 433-1812

Sheelin Shamrock Hotel, Mountnugent, Lough Sheelin. ☎ (049) 40113

Philip Smith, Lavagh, Kilnaleck, Lough Sheelin, ☎ (049) 36156

FISHING CENTER

The International Fishing Center is French-owned and offers accommodation on a full- or half-board basis and has its own restaurant. From $$. Contact Michel Neuville, ☎/fax (049) 952-2616; info@brochet-irlande.com; www.angling-holidays.com.

On Horseback

Cavan Equestrian Centre, Latt, ☎ (049) 433-2017

Killykeen Equestrian Centre in the Forest Park, ☎ (049) 436-1707

Redhill Equestrian Centre, Killynure, ☎ (047) 55042

◆ Golf

The course at the **Slieve Russell Hotel Golf & Country Club** only opened in 1992, but it has since become one of the top-ranking courses in the country, and is compared to some of the great courses world-wide. ☎ (049) 952-6458.

County Cavan Golf Club, two miles (3.2 km) from the town on the R198 to Killeshandra, founded in 1894, is one of the oldest clubs in Ireland. ☎ (049) 433-1541. Other local courses include:

- **Belturbet Golf Club** (nine-hole course). ☎ (049) 952-2287.
- **Blacklion Golf Club**, (nine-hole course) on the shores of Lough Macnean. ☎ (071) 985-3024.

- **Cabra Castle**, (nine-hole course), with the imposing castle hotel as a backdrop. ☎ (042) 966-7030.
- The **Park Hotel**, Virginia, (nine-hole course) overlooking Lough Ramor. ☎ (049) 854-6100.

Pitch-and-Putt

- **Ballyhaise Pitch-and-Putt**, four miles (6.4 km) north of Cavan, is an 18-hole course. ☎ (049) 433-8430.

◆ Where to Stay

For accommodations pricing guide, see page 393.

Hotels

☆☆☆ **The Park Hotel** at Virginia is in an historic building, in its own 100-acre estate. It's on the shore of Lough Ramor, and has beautifully landscaped gardens, plus its own nine-hole golf course. There are 25 bedrooms, and there is a very good restaurant that is popular with locals. Rates from $$, with special midweek offers. ☎ (049) 854-6100; fax 854-7203; virginiapark@eircom.net; www.bichotels.com.

☆☆☆ **Hotel Kilmore** is on Dublin Road, Cavan, and has 39 pleasantly furnished bedrooms. Its **Annalee Restaurant** offers a good selection of dishes, including locally caught fish and game when in season. Rates $$. ☎ (049) 433-2288; fax 433-2458; info@hotelkilmore.ie, www.hotelkilmore.ie.

☆☆ **Bailie Hotel**, Main Street, Bailieborough, is family-run and has 18 bedrooms. Carvery lunch daily, also à la carte and bar food available. At weekends there's live music in the bar. Swimming pool and leisure center in the town. Rate from $$. ☎ (042) 966-5334; fax 966-6506; e-mail: hotelbailie@eircom.net.

Cottages for Rent

There are a number of self-catering houses available through **www.cavantourism.com** or contact the Fáilte Ireland Tourist Information Office, Farnham Street, Cavan, ☎ (049) 433-1942.

In the beautiful setting of the Killykeen Forest Park, already described, you can rent a chalet. ☎ (049) 433-2541.

Camping & RV Parks

☆☆ **Lough Ramor Caravan and Camping Park**, Ryefield, is three miles south of Virginia, off the N3. Open May 1 to September 30. ☎ (01) 837-1717.

Lakelands Caravan and Camping Park at Shercock is on a three-acre site and opens for Easter and again at the beginning of June until the middle of September. ☎ (042) 69488; fax 27302.

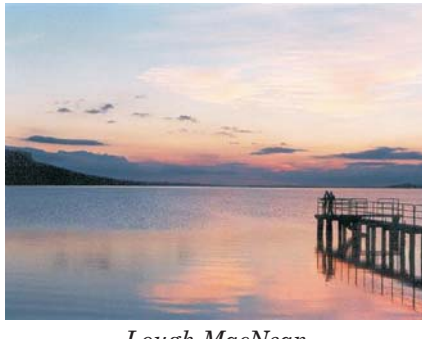
Hostel

The White Star Hostel, Cootehill, is open all year. ☎ (049) 555-2337; whitestar@eircom.net.

County Leitrim

The smallest of the 26 counties that make up the Republic, Leitrim lies mostly inland, with only a tiny stretch, two miles (3.2 km) long, touching the Atlantic near Bundoran, Co. Donegal.

There are lots of lakes, streams, rivers, and bogland. In fact, despite being inland, the county is almost surrounded by water. The **River Shannon** nearly divides it in two and **Loughs MacNean** and **Melvin** and the **River Erne** mark its northern boundary, while part of the expansive **Lough Allen** shares its eastern border with Co. Cavan.



Lough MacNean

In ancient times, the western part of the county was ruled by the O'Rourke clan, and the eastern by the O'Reillys. It was part of the Plantation at the beginning of the 17th century, and towns like Carrick-on-Shannon, Manorhamilton and Jamestown were founded, and most were fortified against the native population at that time.

During famine times and even right up to recent decades, many local people left to seek work, the majority emigrating overseas. The popu-

lation was at its highest at 155,000 in the early 1800s; today it's less than 30,000. That's one of the lowest densities on the island, and there are tax incentives in place to encourage more people to settle here.

Attractions include cruising on the Shannon, fishing, walking and discovering sites of archaeological, historical and cultural interest. Among them is a section of the **Black Pig's Dyke**.

The county town is **Carrick-on-Shannon**, and its other main towns are **Ballinamore**, **Drumshanbo** and **Manorhamilton**.

◆ Getting Here

Carrick-on-Shannon is on the N4 from Dublin (97 miles/ 156 km); the N7-N55-N6-N19 from Galway (75 miles/ 188 km). It is 123 miles (198 km) from Belfast, and 182 miles (293 km) from Cork.

It's on the railway line connecting Dublin and Sligo. The railway station can be reached at ☎ (071) 962-0036. The nearest bus station is in Sligo Town. The closest airports are Knock International and Sligo. The nearest ferry port is Dublin.

◆ Tourist Information

Fáilte Ireland Tourist Information Office, The Old Barrel Store, Carrick-on-Shannon, is open April to October. ☎ (071) 972-0170; fax 962-0089; www.irelandnorthwest.ie, www.leitrim.ie.

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

The **Leitrim Genealogy Centre** is in the County Library, Ballinamore. ☎ (071) 964-4012; info@leitrimroots.com, www.leitrimroots.com.

◆ Sightseeing

Carrick-on-Shannon

The county town grew up around a river crossing at a strategic location, a bit south of where the rivers Boyle and Shannon meet.

Although small, the town has an inviting and cosmopolitan atmosphere, attracting tourists interested in cruising the Shannon or fish-

ing. It has lots of tackle shops and a busy marina, with a huge fleet of cruisers and pleasure craft, a lovely sight.

There are plenty of friendly pubs and restaurants. The new **Dock Arts Centre**, housed in the beautiful 19th-century former Courthouse, hosts performances and exhibitions. Open every day, 10am to 6pm. ☎ (071) 965-0828; info@thedock.ie, www.thedock.ie.

There's a quaint little building on Main Street, the **Costello Chapel**, built by one Edward Costello in the 19th century in memory of his wife, and you can see their coffins, sunk below the floor, under glass. It claims to be the second-smallest chapel in the world.

Explore the County

Head eastwards out of Carrick-on-Shannon and, after nine miles (14.5 km), you come to **Mohill**, where the R201 and R202 meet. It's a busy little place, and a fishing center. It was the birthplace of the blind harpist **Turlough O'Carolan**.

The village of **Fenagh** is two miles (3.2 km) farther, on the northern shore of Fenagh Lough. There are ruins of two Gothic churches here and an impressive 17th-century mausoleum.

Ballinamore, four miles (6.4 km) past Fenagh, is mainly an angling center. It was on coaching routes in former times and has a broad main street. In the former courthouse is the county genealogy center, and a heritage and folk museum.

Manorhamilton

Manorhamilton is in a memorably beautiful location, where four mountain valleys meet, and is surrounded by limestone hills. It is 28 miles (45 km) north of Carrick-on-Shannon on the N16, between Sligo and Enniskillen in Co. Fermanagh, Northern Ireland.

From Manorhamilton you can head off on any of five different roads to explore the surrounding hills on the **North Leitrim Natural History & Heritage Tour**, and there are information panels and a brochure explaining what you see as you drive or cycle.

The eastern route (N16) takes you to Glenfarne, on the shore of Lough MacNean, where there's a forest area owned by Coillte, with waymarked walks around what was the Tottenham estate.

The R282 goes from Manorhamilton to Fowley's Falls and Rossinver, a distance of eight miles (13 km), which makes a pleasant cycle or drive (or even a walk, if you're really fit).

At Rossinver is the **Organic Centre**, where you can visit its demonstration gardens and ask about the courses they run, in everything from designing an edible garden to cheese-making. Most of them last a day, so could easily be done while on vacation. Open daily, 11 am-5 pm. ☎ (071) 985-4338; fax 985-4343; organiccentre@eircom.net, www.theorganiccentre.ie.

Manorhamilton is the home of the Glens Centre, which hosts musical and dramatic performances, films and exhibitions; ☎ (072) 985-5833; fax 985-6063; www.theglenscentre.com.

◆ Adventures

On Foot

LONG DISTANCE WALKS

Manorhamilton is, with Drumshanbo, the starting point for the long-distance waymarked walk, the **Leitrim Way** (30 miles/48 km). Its highest point is at Doo Lough (1,140 feet/347 m).

At Dowra, walkers can connect with another route, part of which goes through Leitrim. The **Miners' Way** traces the routes followed by miners to work, north of Lough Allen, through the hills and valleys of Roscommon and Sligo.

TOWN TRAILS

There are signposted town trails to follow in Ballinamore, Carrick-on-Shannon, Dromahair, Drumshanbo and Manorhamilton. Details from: Tourist Office, Carrick-on-Shannon; The Glens Centre, Manorhamilton; Sliabh-an-Iarainn Visitor Centre, Drumshanbo; Genealogy Centre, Ballinamore.

SCULPTURE TRAIL

Developed by the **Leitrim Sculpture Centre**, Manorhamilton, this trail takes you around the shores of Upper and Lower Lough MacNean, linking southwest Fermanagh in the North with counties Cavan and Leitrim in the Republic. Ask at tourist offices for the lovely brochure-guide.

Contact the **North Leitrim Glens Tourism Co-operative** in Manorhamilton about the 30 delightful walks in the area. ☎ (072) 985-6217; fax 985-6063; nlwalkingfest@hotmail.com.

On Horseback

- ***Hayden Equestrian Centre**, Carrick-on-Shannon. ☎ (071) 963-8049*
- ***Moorlands Equestrian and Leisure Centre**, Drumshanbo. ☎ (071) 964-1792*

On Water

CRUISING

Emerald Star, the largest inland waterway-cruiser rental company in the country, has a base at Carrick-on-Shannon; from here you can head off for a vacation on water. It also has bases in Portumna, Co. Galway, and Belturbet, Co. Cavan. ☎ (071) 962-0234; fax 962-1433; info@emeraldstar.ie; www.emeraldstar.ie.

Other cruiser companies based here are:

Carrick Craft, ☎ (071) 962-0236, carrick@carrickcraft.com

Crown Blue Line, ☎ (071) 962-7634

Tara Cruisers, ☎ (071) 962-2266

The waterbus ***Moon River*** **Pleasure Cruiser** leaves from Carrick-on-Shannon, and has a full bar and refreshments on board. ☎ (071) 962-1777; moonriver@eircom.net; www.moon-river.net. You can also take a trip on a waterbus from Ballinamore; contact ☎ (071) 964-4079.

Locaboat has a fleet of boats based at The Marina, Ballinamore. The company designs and builds its own boats; the smallest has two berths, the largest sleeps up to 12. They're available by the week, the weekend or for short breaks. ☎ (071) 964-5300; fax 964-5301; info@locaboat.com; www.locaboat.com.

FISHING

Carrick-on-Shannon is the center for fishing on rivers Shannon and Boyle, loughs Key, Allen, Corry and Drumharlow, and many smaller streams and lakes. Rooskey is the center for coarse fishing on rivers Shan-

non, Rinn or Rynn, and many small lakes in the area. There are tackle shops in all towns associated with fishing.

INFORMATION

- The **North Western Regional Fisheries Board**, ☎ (096) 22788, www.northwestfisheries.ie
- The **Northern Regional Fisheries Board**, ☎ (072) 985-1435, www.nrfb.ie
- **Inland Waterways Association of Ireland**, www.iwai.ie, Lo-call in Ireland, ☎ 1890 924991
- **Shannon Fishery**, www.shannon-fishery-board.ie
- **Carrick-on-Shannon Angling Club**, ☎ (071) 962-0313

◆ Golf

- ***Ballinamore Golf Club**, nine-hole, ☎ (071) 964-4346*
- ***Carrick-on-Shannon Golf Club**, 18-hole, ☎ (071) 966-7015*

◆ Where to Stay

Hotels

☆☆☆ **The Bush Hotel**, one of Ireland's oldest, was refurbished in recent years and is on Main Street, Carrick-on-Shannon. It has kept its traditional atmosphere and added modern comforts. It has 60 bedrooms, and behind it is a courtyard and pleasant gardens. See under *Where to Eat* below for details of its dining facilities. Rates $$. ☎ (071) 967-1000; info@bushhotel.com, www.bushhotel.com.

☆☆ **Kilbrackan Arms Hotel**, Carrigallen, is small and family-run, ideally located for exploring the lakeland counties. It has a bar and the Stove restaurant. Rates $. ☎ (049) 433-9737; fax 433-9152, info@kilbrackanarms.com.

☆ **The Breffni Centre Hotel** is on Dromahair's Main Street and offers guests comfortable accommodation. It has a bar and dining room and a tennis court. Rates $. ☎ (071) 916-4199; breffnicentre@eircom.net.

Guesthouses & Rentals

Hollywell is an historic house with miles of wild river meadows and a garden, it's almost on Carrick Bridge in Carrick-on-Shannon. ☎ (071) 962-1124.

Gortmor Farmhouse, with angling facilities, is nearby, two miles off the N4. ☎ (071) 962-0489.

At **Drumcoura Lake Resort**, three miles (4.8 km) from Ballinamore, guests can ride, fish, go boating, play tennis, walk, or just relax. Accommodation is in self-catering wooden chalets; there's also a bar and restaurant. The chalets sleep from three to seven, and can be rented on a daily basis per person, or on a weekly basis per chalet.

The resort has its own equestrian center, with lessons available. Fishing is on the 50-acre lake, where there are boats to hire; or you can fish from the bank. Boating is in a rowboat from the jetty. ☎ (071) 964-5781; info@drumcoura.ie; www.drumcoura.ie.

Guesthouses in the country are listed on www.townandcountry.ie.

Camping & RV Park

Lough Rynn Caravan & Camping Park, Mohill, is on the lakeshore, open Easter to September. It's unclassified. ☎ (071) 963-6128.

Hostel

Leitrim Lakes Hostel, in Kiltyclogher, has camping facilities as well, open all year. ☎ (071) 985-4044; llhostel@gofree.indigo.ie.

◆ Where to Eat

The Courtyard Restaurant at the Bush Hotel in Carrick-on-Shannon has a very good reputation for its fresh and wholesome food. The hotel's **Coffee Shop** has a carvery and buffet, and is open throughout the day. ☎ (071) 962-0014; fax 962-1180.

The Brandywell Bar and Restaurant is on the N4 in the very attractive village of Dromod. The pub is decorated in a contemporary style, with a welcoming and relaxed atmosphere, and has an excellent reputation. ☎ (071) 963-8153; fax 965-8937.

Smyths Pub & Restaurant, Main Street, Ballinamore, offers good value, its menu includes steaks, ☎ (071) 964-4955.

Philosopher's Scone on High Street, Drumshanbo, is open Monday to Saturday from 9am-6pm, serving snacks and meals, ☎ (071) 964- 0997.

County Monaghan

Monaghan is an inland county and one of the smallest, only covering 500 square miles (1,300 square km). It's often described as "drumlin country" from the small hills dotting the landscape, which were left behind when the glaciers retreated – the word coming from the Irish "droim," meaning back or hump. Patrick Kavanagh, one of Ireland's greatest poets, described his birthplace as having "stony grey soil."

The county takes its name from the Irish "muineachán," meaning "the place of the shrubs," which is understandable even today, given the areas of woodland and forest parks, which make it so attractive.

Its undulating and fertile landscape, with small sloping hills, is perfect for walking. Because of the gentle terrain, the cyclist will enjoy exploring, stopping in a quiet village to rest.

Its streams, rivers and lakes have made the county one of the most popular destinations for anglers in the country. It's also dotted with many interesting and historic sites.

The county capital and largest town is also called **Monaghan** and among its other main towns are **Castleblaney** and **Carrickmacross**.

◆ Getting Here

Monaghan Town is on major routes N2 from Dublin (79 miles/127 km); and N54-N2-A3-A27-A3-M1 from Belfast (58 miles/93 km). It is 132 miles (212 km) from Galway and 216 miles (348 km) from Cork.

The bus station in town is at ☎ (047) 82377. The nearest train station is in Newry, the nearest airport is Belfast City, and the nearest seaport is Belfast.

◆ Tourist Information

Fáilte Ireland Tourist Office, Market House, Monaghan, open March-October. ☎ (047) 81122.

Monaghan Tourism, TEK Building, Knockaconny, ☎ (047) 71818, www.monaghantourism.com.

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

Monaghan Ancestry, Clogher Historical Society, 6 Tully Street, Monaghan, ☎ (047) 82304.

◆ Sightseeing

Monaghan Town

Lough Muckno

Monaghan Town is in the north-central area of the county. It was built near a *crannóg* in early Christian times, but what you see today really began at the time of the Plantation around 1613, when it became a thriving center for the linen industry and lace-making.

The **County Monaghan Museum** is on Hill Street, and its collection is a good place to start if you want to learn about the area's past. The museum won a prestigious European award, so is worth at least a brief visit. ☎ (047) 82928; comuseum@monaghancoco.ie.

The **St. Louis Convent Heritage Centre** links the story of the order with Irish, European and world history and shows its relevance in the immediate area since the time of the Great Famine of 1845. In its grounds is the crannóg where the town began. ☎ (047) 83529. There's a town trail map available from the Tourist Office.

Today the town is a center for coarse fishing. There are lots of pubs where visitors can enjoy traditional and other styles of music, and there's an annual **Rhythm and Blues Festival** in September. The Garage Theatre hosts touring as well as locally produced shows. ☎ (047) 81597; www.garagetheatre.com, info@garagetheatre.com.

Castleblaney

Castleblaney is 15 miles (24 km) southeast of Monaghan on the N2, close to the border with Co. Armagh. It's on a narrow strip of land at

the head of **Lough Muckno**, the county's largest stretch of water, covering about 900 acres.

The town was founded on the site of an early Christian church. It takes its name from the Blaney family who built it. Its courthouse, the church and market house date from the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

These days it's one of the main angling centers in the county, and there are lots of pubs and places to eat, as well as places to stay. If you're looking for an indoor activity, there's a 10-pin bowling complex in town. ☎ (042) 974-9944.

Inniskeen

Take the N53 south from Castleblaney and you come to Inniskeen, birthplace of the late poet and novelist **Patrick Kavanagh** in 1904. The annual Patrick Kavanagh weekend takes place here in November.

The **Rural and Literary Resource Centre** bearing his name is in the church, and in it you can find out not just about him, but also about the area's history, geology and mythology. Kavanagh is buried in the churchyard. ☎ (042) 937-8560; www.patrickkavanaghcountry.com.

There are signposts in town to places in the locality associated with the writer's work, and a round tower and a Norman motte overlook the village. Nearby is the **Fane River Park**, where you can take a stroll; the river is known for its salmon.

Carrickmacross

South of Inniskeen is Carrickmacross, on the N2. If you've heard of it, that's most likely because of the lace that bears its name. It's an attractive and busy market town that grew up around a castle built by the Earl of Essex in 1630.

Carrickmacross Lace

The St. Louis nuns, whose convent stands on the site of the castle, were largely responsible for reviving the tradition of lace-

making in the area. Nowadays the **Carrickmacross Lace Cooperative** continues to keep the tradition going, and you can buy locally made lace at the Gallery Centre and watch demonstrations by prior arrangement. ☎ (042) 966 2506.

Ballybay

North of Carrickmacross is **Ballybay**, beside Lough Major. It used to be involved in the linen industry, and is now an angling center. There are pleasant forest walks in the **Billy Fox Memorial Park** just outside town on the road to Cootehill.

Clones

If you continue on from here, you pass through Newbliss and reach Clones (pronounced clone-ez), on the N54, 11 miles (18 km) southwest of Monaghan, where there's a high cross dating from the ninth or 10th century. This is the birthplace of the award-winning writer Patrick McCabe, whose novel *The Butcher Boy* was filmed here in 1998, directed by Neil Jordan.

The 12th-century abbey has an unusual feature – a Celtic cross sculpted in relief on its northern wall – and the sarcophagus of St. Tiernach, an abbot here in the sixth century, is beside the round tower. Near the town there are the ruins of a motte and bailey fort.

Locally made lace is exhibited and sold at the **Ulster Canal Store**. You can also hire bikes, get visitor information or relax over a snack. ☎ (047) 51718.

Just outside Clones is **Scotshouse**, where you can see a portion of the ancient border, the Black Pig's Dyke; www.clones.ie.

Castle Leslie

The picturesque village of Glaslough, six miles (9.7 km) northeast of Monaghan on the N12/R185, is at the gates of **Castle Leslie**, home to the Leslie family since 1664. Its setting overlooking Glaslough Lake is absolutely beautiful. The 1,000-acre estate has three lakes, rolling parkland and ancient woodland, and is open for the public to enjoy. The castle also has accommodation (adults only) and dining; rates from $$. ☎ (047) 88109; ultan@castle-leslie.ie; www.castleleslie.com.

◆ Adventures

On Foot

SIGNPOSTED WALKS

In the ***Sliabh Beagh*** area at Knockatallon there are a number of signposted walks, some of them crossing the border into neighboring counties.

The waymarked long distance route, the **Monaghan Way**, is in the final stages of development and will open soon. Ask at tourist offices or call ☎ (042) 974-5173.

Walking brochures are available both for the local walks, and for the waymarked walks throughout the Sliabh Beagh Region in Ulster. Contact **Sliabh Beagh Rural Tourism Centre**. ☎ (047) 89014; Knockatallon@eircom.net; www.knockatallon.com.

PARKS & PRESERVES

The **Rossmore Forest Park**, near Monaghan Town, is the former estate of Robert Cunningham, a Member of the British Parliament from 1769-96. ☎ (047) 81968.

Hollywood Park is less than five miles (eight km) from Monaghan, off the Balloon-to-Scotstown road. There are nature walks, fishing stands, and you can go boating there. ☎ (047) 83004.

Overlooking Lough Muckno is **Hope Castle**, named after Henry Hope (and sometimes called Blayney Castle after the previous owner), who owned one of the largest uncut diamonds ever and who bought the estate in 1870. Nowadays the estate is the **Lough Muckno Leisure Park**. Activities include pony-trekking, forest walks, orienteering, biking, and watersports. There's a nine-hole golf course, fishing stands, and a bar and restaurant. Castleblaney, Monaghan. ☎ (042) 964-6356.

On Wheels

The **Kingfisher Cycle Trail** covers 229 miles (370 km), taking you through Fermanagh, Leitrim, Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan. It was developed as a cross-border project, designed in the shape of a figure eight so you can follow it in sections or as a whole.

Further information from Monaghan Tourism or from the Tourist Information Centre in Enniskillen. In the North, ☎ (028) 6632-0121.

SLIABH BEAGH CYCLING ROUTES

There are five routes, varying in length, through Monaghan and Fermanagh, one linking to the Kingfisher Trail. For maps and details, contact the **Sliabh Beagh Development Association**, Unit 7/8 Roslea Enterprise Centre, Roslea, Co. Fermanagh, ☎ (048) 6775 1918; info@sliabhbeagh.org, www.sliabhbeagh.org; the **Sliabh Beagh Tourism Centre**, Knockatallon, Co. Monaghan, ☎ (047) 89014; or regional tourist information offices.

BIKE RENTAL

- **McQuaid Cycle Hire**, Glaslough. ☎ (047) 88108
- **Snipe Cycle Hire**, Clones. ☎ (047) 52125

RALLY

At the **Rally School of Ireland** at Scotstown, northwest of Monaghan Town, novice and advanced drivers can enjoy a circuit over mixed terrain. ☎ (047) 89098; info@rallyschoolireland.com.

On Horseback

Day rates are available at the **Greystone Equestrian Centre**, Glaslough, in the Castle Leslie Estate. ☎ (047) 88100; gec@eircom.net.

There's also a **School of Equitation** at Carrickmacross. ☎ (042) 966-1017; jcmxequi@gofree.indigo.ie.

On Water

FISHING

Monaghan has plenty of rivers, lakes and streams. There are centers at Carrickmacross, Ballybay, Castleblaney, along the River Blackwater, and around Clones and Monaghan town, where visitors will get all the assistance and equipment needed.

Maps and other advice are also available from tourist offices, and from the Eastern Regional Fisheries Board, ☎ (01) 278-7022; www.erfb.ie, and the Northern Regional Fisheries Board, ☎ (049) 433-7174; www.fishingireland.net.

◆ Golf

Near Carrickmacross there are two 18-hole courses:

- **Nuremore Hotel and Country Club**, ☎ (042) 966-4016; nuremore@eircom.net
- The **Mannan Castle Club**, ☎ (042) 966-3308; mannancastlegc@eircom.net

There are also nine-hole courses at **Clones**, ☎ (047) 56017, and at the very scenic **Castleblaney Golf Course** at Lough Muckno. ☎ (042) 974-9485; rayker@eircom.net.

- **Rossmore Club** is close to the Forest Park of the same name. ☎ (047) 81316.

There are driving ranges at **Inniskeen**, ☎ (042) 937-8425, and in **Monaghan Town**, ☎ (047) 84909.

Pitch & Putt

- **Monaghan Valley Pitch-and-Putt**, ☎ (047) 84928
- **Inniskeen**, ☎ (042) 937-8230
- **Rowan Springs**, Castleblayney, ☎ (042) 974-0096
- **Malones**, Castleblaney, ☎ (042) 974-0613
- **Lakeview**, Carrickmacross, ☎ (042) 966 4269

◆ Where to Stay

Hotels

ACCOMMODATIONS

$ . . . . . under $60
$$. $61-120
$$$. $121-182
$$$$. $183-243
$$$$$. . . . . over $244

☆☆☆ **Glencarn Hotel and Leisure Center** is at Castleblaney on the main road between Dublin and the northwest and beside Lough Muckno Forest Park. It has 27 bedrooms, a restaurant and its **Temple Bar** offers live music and hosts a nightclub at weekends. Rates from $$. ☎ (042) 974-6666; fax 974-6521.

The Lennard Arms Hotel, The Diamond, Clones, is family-run and offers 10 comfortable bedrooms, friendly staff and good food, excellent value at $. ☎ (047) 51075.

Sliabh Beagh Tourism Centre, Knockatallon, has 14 rooms available with breakfast included and evening meals on request. There's a restaurant in the center and the **County Hollow Bar** has live music every Friday and Saturday and Traditional Irish music on Sunday nights. Rate $$, ☎ (047) 89014; knockatallon@eircom.net, www.knockatallon.com.

Rental Properties

☆☆☆ **Sliabh Beagh Mountain Lodges**, Scotstown, are on the outskirts of the village of Knockatallon, just over nine miles from Monaghan Town and close to the border with Co. Fermanagh. The lodges are made up of four apartments that sleep four or five. They have a courtyard and landscaped garden with a barbecue. ☎ (047) 89997; fax 89926; mullen@eircom.net. Guests can enjoy the amenities at the **Sliabh Beagh Tourism Centre** in the village as well. ☎ (047) 89014; knockatallon@eircom.net; www.knockatallon.com.

☆☆☆ Overlooking its own private lake is **Lisanisk House**, within walking distance of Carrickmacross. It has two apartments, which sleep eight, and guests are offered the use of boats free. ☎ (042) 966-1035; rosaleenmcmahon@eircom.net.

◆ Where to Eat

Tommies Restaurant on Glaslough Street, Monaghan, is a good place to stop any time, as it's open from 9 am to 8 pm every day of the week. It serves breakfast, traditional dishes, and caters well to vegetarians. ☎ (047) 81772.

McNello's Bar and Lounge, Inniskeen, the birthplace of poet Patrick Kavanagh. It won an award as one of Ireland's Pubs of Distinction in 2000. McNello's serves good bar food. ☎ (042) 937-8355.

The Squealing Pig Bar and its **Mullan Mills Restaurant** is in the center of Monaghan Town. Bar food is available from noon to 3 pm, Monday to Friday. The restaurant is open from 5-10:30 pm Monday to Saturday, and on Sundays from 4 pm. Its menu includes steaks and traditional Irish food. ☎ (047) 84562; fax 71976.

The North

Northern Ireland has a fascinating variety of landscapes. It's tourism areas correspond roughly to the **Six Counties** that make up the North: the drama of the **Causeway Coast** and its inland Glens; Derry City and **County Londonderry**; the Sperrins mountains and surrounding moors, taking in County Tyrone and parts of Londonderry; the **Kingdoms of Down**; the city of **Armagh** and its county; and the **Fermanagh-Lakeland** region. The capital, **Belfast**, is on the border between County Antrim and County Down.

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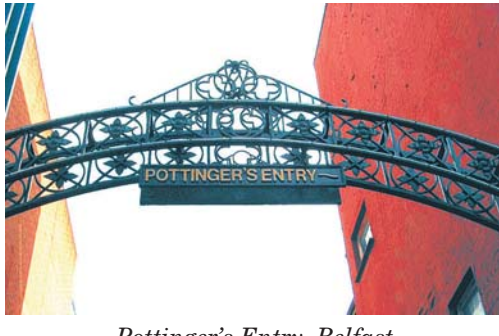
While essentially rural, there are lots of towns and villages, as well as five Cities to explore. Queen Elizabeth II of England marked her Golden Jubilee in 2002 by conferring City status on **Lisburn** and **Newry**, so they have joined the ancient cathedral cities of **Belfast**, **Derry** and **Armagh**.



Pottinger's Entry, Belfast

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Belfast

Belfast, the capital of Northern Ireland, is on the River Lagan in the southeastern corner of County Antrim, with a small portion of the city edging into County Down. Its setting is very attractive, nestling in a semicircle of hills, where the River Lagan enters Belfast Lough. About a third of the population of Northern Ireland – about half a million people – live here.

The Industrial Revolution of the early 19th century heralded the city's boom time, with industries including rope making and shipbuilding, as well as linen, leading to its doubling in size each decade.

Civil unrest from 1969 on meant stagnation until the end of the 20th century, but an enormous amount of building has been going on since the Peace Process began.

If all you know about Belfast are your memories of The Troubles, then you will be as surprised and delighted as I was when you visit. It's a lively and friendly city, with historic buildings standing side-by-side with modern creations, among them the circular Waterfront Hall, close to the 19th century Harbor Office and Custom House.

Lamp post, Ulster Hall

◆ Getting Here

By Air

There are two airports: Belfast City Airport, now called **George Best Belfast City Airport** after the late footballer, is three miles (4.8 km) east of the city, ☎ (028) 9093-9093, www.belfastcityairport.com. **Belfast International Airport**, ☎ (028) 9448-4848, www.belfastairport.com, is 19 miles (30 km) west of the city.

By Rail

A shuttle bus service operates between the City Airport Terminal and the adjacent rail stop at **Sydenham**, which has twice-hourly rail service (6 am-6 pm) Monday-Friday to **Central** and **Victoria Street Stations**. (Service is hourly after 6 pm and on Saturdays and Sundays.) You can connect at Central Station with the rail network in Northern Ireland and on to the Irish Republic.

Making Connections

Use the CentraLink bus to travel between the Europa Bus Centre, Central Station, Laganside and the city center. It's free to rail and bus passengers, Monday-Friday.

BY BUS

The **Airbus** service operates between Belfast International and the Europa Bus Centre, Glengall Street, every 30 minutes, Monday to Saturday, and at 30- or 60-minute intervals on Sunday, from 5:45 am to 11:20 pm.

Flexibus operates the **Airlink** every 20 minutes from Belfast City Airport to the Europa Bus Centre in the heart of the city. The service runs from 6 am to 21:50 (9:50) pm and costs £2.00 round-trip. **No. 3 Metrobus** operates every 20 minutes from Sydenham to City Hall. It's a five-minute walk from the City Airport to the bus stop.

BY TAXI

The **International Airport Taxi Company** is the official operator from that airport; the fare to Belfast City Centre is approximately £25, with a taxi-share scheme available. To book ahead, ☎ (028) 9448-4353.

At George Best Belfast City Airport, approved taxis operate from a rank outside the terminal; fare to the city center is approximately £6.

From the Republic

The **Enterprise Train** from Connolly Station, Dublin, runs eight times a day, Monday to Saturday, and five times on Sundays, in both directions; the trip takes two hours each way. Ideal for a day trip. Best fares available online; www.translink.co.uk.

Ulsterbus covers all of Northern Ireland outside Belfast, including express services to/from Dublin. ☎ (028) 9033-3000. **Bus Éireann** also runs an Expressway service between Dublin and Belfast. From Northern Ireland, ☎ 00353-1-836-6111; from the Republic, (01) 836-6111; www.buseireann.ie.

◆ Getting Around the North

By Bus & Rail

Within the North there's a good rail and bus network, including express buses between towns without rail connections. For all bus and rail timetable inquiries, contact **Translink**, ☎ (028) 9066-6630 or www.translink.co.uk. They also run a number of daytours exploring the North.

By Road

Main roads radiating from Belfast are the M1, which runs southwest to Lisburn and then westwards to just south of Dungannon; and the M2, which goes through Templepatrick northwest of the city and on to Antrim.

North of the city, the A2 brings you along by the coast from Derry, passing the port of Larne. East of the city the A2 takes you along Belfast Lough to Bangor and then follows the coast southwards to Portaferry and Strangford.

To travel to Dublin you take the M1 to Lisburn, then the A1 to Newry and on to the border with the Republic, where the A1 continues to Dublin.

◆ Getting Around Belfast

By Bus

Metro, Belfast's new bus service, integrates Citybus and Ulsterbus services within the city, with 12 routes. Buses run frequently, Monday to Friday, 7am to 6pm (less often at other times) along the main arterial roads into the center, and along other routes throughout the Greater Belfast area.

For routes and timetabes see www.translink.co.uk/Metro. There's also a kiosk for information and tickets in Donegall Square West (Monday to Friday, 8am-5:30pm) or ask at the Europa Bus Centre, Glengall Street.

1. City Hall
2. Linen Hall Library
3. Castlecourt Shopping Centre
4. St. Anne's Cathedral
5. The Odyssey
6. Albert Clock
7. Waterfront Hall
8. St. George's Market
9. Queen's University
10. Botanical Gardens, Ulster Museum
11. Opera House
12. War Memorial Building
13. SeaCat/Isle of Man Ferry Terminal
14. Lagan Weir, Lookout, Riverside Walk
15. Old Museum

ί Tourist Information

Railway Line, Stations

By Taxi

Call ☎ 1-800-TAXI-CAB to connect with local taxi companies at no extra charge. A system of shared black taxis developed in West Belfast during the Troubles when official bus services withdrew during riots. Known as the **People's Taxis**, they operate along fixed routes for a pound a trip. They leave the city center from a depot on the corner of Castle and King streets. You can hail them en route and if there's room for you they will stop.

CURRENCY

The Republic of Ireland was one of the EU Member States that adopted the European Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) in 1999. The United Kingdom did not, so Northern Ireland, which is part of the UK, continues to use the British pound Sterling. Don't forget to change some of your money when you cross the border.

Remember, all over Northern Ireland, check www.translink.co.uk with all public transport inquiries.

◆ Tourist Information

Before exploring, call the **Belfast & Northern Ireland Welcome Centre** at 47 Donegall Place, opposite City Hall, and pick up a free map of the city and lots of free brochures. The friendly staff will help with any queries and you can also change money and book accommodations here. ☎ (028) 9024-6609; fax 9031-2424; belfastwelcomecentre@nitic.net; www.gotobelfast.com or www.discovernorthernireland.com.

Cultúrlann, 216 Falls Road, ☎ (028) 9096-4188; fax 9096-4189; failte@culturlann.org

Lisburn Tourist Information Centre, The Square, ☎ (028) 9266-0038

Hillsborough Tourist Information Centre, The Courthouse, The Square, ☎ (028) 9268-9717

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

Ulster Historical Foundation runs a professional genealogical service. It's based at 12 College Square East, Belfast. ☎ USA/Canada 0044-28-9033-2288; fax 9023-9885; enquiry@uhf.org.uk. If you want to do the research yourself, the **Public Record Office** at 66 Balmoral Avenue is the best place to start. Open weekdays except Wednesday, 9am-4:45pm; Thursday 10am-8:45pm. ☎ (028) 9025-5905; fax 9025-5999; proni@dcalni.gov.uk; www.proni.gov.uk. **The General Register Office**, Oxford House, 49 Chichester Street, holds records, including births and deaths since 1864. Open Monday-Friday, 9:30-4 pm. ☎ (028) 9025-2000; www.nisra.gov.uk/gro.

◆ Sightseeing

City Center

City Hall, Belfast

Head first for **Belfast City Hall**, where you can take a free 45-minute tour and hear about the city's history. Tours: June-September, Monday-Friday, 11 am, 2 pm, 3 pm; Saturday, 2:30 pm; October-May, Monday-Friday, 11 am and 2:30 pm; Saturday, 2:30 pm. ☎ (028) 9027-0456; civicbuildings@belfastcity.gov.uk; www.belfastcity.gov.uk.

One of my favorite places in the entire country is **The Linen Hall Library**, 17 Donegall Square North, founded in 1788. It's a cultural center with exhibitions and other events, as well as a library. Its Northern Ireland Political Collection of 250,000 items is unique, and includes baby bibs, letters smuggled out of prison in body orifices, as well as documents.

Tours every Wednesday at 11:30am year-round, and on Mondays and Fridays from June through August. For a reservation, ☎ (028) 9087-2214. Admission and tours are free, but donations are

requested. Coffee shop and gift shop. General inquiries, ☎ (028) 9032-1707; info@linenhall.com, www.linenhall.com.

Another fascinating place to visit is the permanent exhibition, **Northern Ireland in the Second World War**, War Memorial Building, 9 Waring Street, off Royal Avenue. More than 300,000 American and other Allied servicemen were based in the North during the war, so visitors from overseas will find it of particular interest. What's especially charming is the simplicity of the displays, and the custodian who loves talking to visitors. Open Monday-Friday, 9 am to 5 pm, admission free. ☎ (028) 9032-0392.

From Waring Street head to the **Lagan Weir and Lookout**. Exhibits explain how the weir, or dam, works, highlight local wildlife and summarize the city's history. There are art trails to follow and great views from the walkways. Open daily. ☎ (028) 9031-5444; www.laganside.com, www.laganlookout.com.

Pay a visit to the attractive **Waterfront Hall**, which has a bar/restaurant, and you can find out about entertainment during your stay.

Ulster Museum & Botanic Gardens

The Ulster Museum, in the Botanic Gardens near Queen's University, has miles of galleries and exhibitions. Learn about the city's past, and the background to the North's political unrest, in its permanent exhibitions; see its art and archaeology collections. There are also temporary exhibitions, events and lectures. Allow a couple of hours for your visit. To get there take the Metro bus 8A/8B, from Donegall Square East in the city center, or walk. Admission free. Open Monday-Friday, 10 am to 5 pm, Saturday, 1-5 pm, Sunday, 2 to 5 pm. ☎ (028) 9038-3000; www.ulstermuseum.org.uk.

Palm House

The surrounding gardens are absolutely wonderful, with herbaceous borders, a rose garden and **Palm House**,. If your time is limited,

make sure you visit the **Tropical Ravine**, with its amazing collection. Gardens always open. The Palm House and Ravine are open April-September, Monday-Friday from 10 am to 5 pm, Saturday, Sunday, Public Holidays, 2-5 pm; October-March, they close at 4 pm. Note that they're also closed at lunchtime. Admission free. ☎ (028) 9032-4902.

Political Murals

Most of these world-famous murals, icons of the Troubles, can be seen in the Shankill and around the Falls Road. If you don't take an organized tour, the best thing to do first is to get some information. At 216 Falls Road is *Cultúrlann*, where you can find out about tours of the nationalist area, including its historic cemeteries. There is an informative brochure available, and the arts center has a program of events too. West Belfast Tourism Information Point, ☎ (028) 9096-4188; www.westbelfast-failte.com, oifigfailte@culturlann.ie.

Before exploring the Shankill area, head for **Fernhill House** in Glencairn Park. At Fernhill is the **People's Museum**, which explores the history of the Greater Shankill, and has the largest collection of Orange memorabilia in the world. Open Monday-Saturday, 10 am-4 pm, Sundays, 1-4 pm. ☎ (028) 9071-5599. Ask for the map-leaflet, which gives a history of the Shankill. James Buchanan, 15th US President (1857-61), is featured on one of the murals along the Ulster-Scots tour.

In this neighborhood you'll see the famous **Peace Walls**, huge 16- to 18-foot-tall barriers, erected to keep neighbors apart. They run between Catholic and Protestant areas.

The Titanic Quarter

This waterfront area between **Corporation Street** and **Queens Road** is dominated by the huge shipyard cranes, nicknamed Samson and Goliath. It's being redeveloped to focus on Belfast's maritime and shipbuilding heritage, including the building of the ill-fated *Titanic*. Historic buildings, including the drawing offices where the *Titanic* was designed, are being preserved. Check out www.titanicquarter.com for progress.

The ***Titanic* Trail** is a self-guided walk exploring landmarks in the city center and *Titanic* Quarter – you start and finish at the Welcome Centre opposite City Hall, where a map-guide is available, or you can download it from www.gotobelfast.com.

Belfast Castle & Cave Hill

Belfast Castle

Three miles north of the city, Belfast Castle overlooks the city from Cave Hill Country Park; you can get there by Citybus 45-51. Cave Hill is the highest point on the hills surrounding the city. The Castle was built in Scottish baronial style in 1870 and, with its gardens, was given to the city in 1934. Open daily, admission free. There are free guided tours in summer; call to check times, ☎ (028) 9077-6925; www.belfastcastle.co.uk.

Guided Tours

BY BUS

A good way to see the city is by guided tour. **Belfast City Sightseeing** runs a hop-on-and-off bus tour, taking in the main sites, including the *Titanic* Quarter and the political murals, on open-top double deckers. (covered when weather is bad). Starts at Castle Place. ☎ (028) 9062-6888; info@belfastcitysightseeing.com, www.belfastcitysightseeing.com.

Mini-Coach Tours run daily, 10:30am, and Monday to Friday, 12:30 pm from the Belfast International Youth Hostel, 22 Donegall Road. Trips outside the city are also offered. Contact the Hostel, ☎ (028) 9032-4733; info@minicoachni.co.uk, www.minicoachni.co.uk.

BY TAXI

For a more intimate experience, take a taxi. **Valuecabs Taxi Tours**, seat four to six, choice of tours, ☎ (028) 9080-9080; info@valuecabs.co.uk, www.valuecabs.co.uk.

All Ireland Tours, ☎ (028) 9030-1832; martin@allirelandtours.com, www.allirelandtours.com.

Black Cab Tours NI, ☎ (077) 5409-5736 or 9860-2401 (mobiles); blackcabtoursni@hotmail.com www.blackcabtoursni.com.

BY BIKE

A novel way to discover Belfast is to take a guided tour by bike. **Life Cycles**, 36-7 Smithfield Market, runs self-guided and guided tours. ☎ (028) 9043-9959; cyclehire@lifecycles.co.uk, www.lifecycles.co.uk.

Lisburn Area

Lisburn, recently designated a city, is 10 miles (16 km) southwest of Belfast, off the M1 motorway. Sadly, in 1707 a fire destroyed most of the older buildings and its castle. It was a very important linen town, and the history of that industry is presented in the **Irish Linen Centre** and **Lisburn Museum**, both housed in the 18th-century Assembly Rooms in the Market Square. You can even try a bit of scutching or spinning yourself. There's also a shop and café. Open Monday-Saturday, 9:30 am-5 pm. ☎ (028) 9266-3377; www.lisburn.gov.uk.

On an island in the river is the **Lagan Valley Island Complex**, with a restaurant and Arts Centre. Check out its program. ☎ (028) 9250-9509; arts.information@iac.lisburn.gov.uk. There's lots of parking on Queen's Road and Gregg Street, and the Island Complex is within easy walking distance of the city center.

Just south of Lisburn is **Long Kesh Prison**, notorious for its H-block cells, where in 1981 Bobby Sands MP and nine other Republican prisoners died on hunger strike and where, in 1998, Billy Wright, leader of the Loyalist Volunteer Force, was shot dead, setting off a series of murders in retaliation. You can see the prison from the M1.

Hillsborough, off the A1, south of Lisburn, and 10 miles (16 km) from Belfast, is one of the most English-looking villages in Northern Ireland. **Hillsborough Castle** (c.1797), which you can see through its magnificent wrought-iron gates, is where US Presidents and British and Irish Prime Ministers have met to discuss the political situation over the years. The very attractive village has a Gothic church, fine Georgian architecture, and many of the terraced buildings along its steep main street house antique and craft shops. There's an International Oyster Festival here in September.

◆ Adventures

On Foot

The **Cave Hill Heritage Centre** is in Belfast Castle, and is well worth visiting. Admission free, open Monday-Saturday, 9 am to 10 pm; Sunday, 9 am to 6 pm. Go there before setting off to explore at least part of the 750-acre **Cave Hill Country Park**, which includes Belfast Zoo, the Castle estate, Hazelwood and Bellevue estates to the north, Carr's Glen Linear Park to the west and the former Wallace Estate to the east.

There are a number of waymarked walking routes close to the city, including along the **Lagan Valley Regional Park towpath**, also used by cyclists. South of the city, the **Barnett Trail** is very picturesque. Details from Belfast City Council Parks and Amenities section. ☎ (028) 9032-0202.

Colin Glen Forest Park is a mile northwest of Dunmurry, near the M1, and is easy to reach from the city in 15 minutes. There are self-guided waymarked routes – over 3½ miles (4½ km) of paths. The main starting point is at the Forest Park Centre, where you can learn more about the park.

The **Upper Colin Glen** is owned by the National Trust. It is more suited to experienced walkers. Suitable footwear is advised. ☎ (028) 9061-4115; www.colinglentrust.org, www.nationaltrust.org.uk.

Sir Thomas and Lady Dickson Park, Upper Malone Road, is a pleasant place to relax or walk. It covers 128 acres (50 hectares), with rolling lawns and meadows, a Japanese garden and a walled garden.

At Lisburn, there's a river walkway along the Lagan, with public gardens and the reinstated historic canal.

At **Hillsborough**, 10 miles (16 km) from Belfast, there's a **circular walk** around the lake. There are also **walking tours** – both guided and self-guided; details from the Tourist Information Centre in Hillsborough. ☎ (028) 9268-9773.

On Wheels

There's a network of traffic-free routes for cyclists around the city. The **Lagan & Lough Cycle Way** runs for 21 miles (33km) between Lisburn, Belfast and Jordanstown, and is almost traffic-free. Free leaflets available on www.sustrans.org.uk or from tourist offices. The Tourist Board publishes an excellent free booklet, *Cycling in Northern Ireland*. Bikes can be rented from **Life Cycles**, 35 Smithfield Market, ☎ (028) 9043-9959.

On Water

BOATING

At the Lagan Weir and Lookout you can take a trip with the **Lagan Boat Company**, which runs a regular daily service. ☎ (028) 9033-0844; info@laganboatcompany.com; www.laganboatcompany.com.

FISHING

The stretch of the River Lagan from Stranmillis Weir to Shaw's Bridge in Belfast offers decent coarse fishing. Belfast and Lisburn are near **Strangford Lough** and **Lough Neagh** (see chapters on the Kingdoms of Down and the Sperrins). Also contact the **Kinnego Marina**, Oxford Island, Craigavon, about Lough Neagh. ☎ (028) 3832-7573.

Regional angling guides are available from the Belfast Welcome Centre and other Tourist Information Centres, or info@nitb.com; www.discovernorthernireland.com/angling.

PERMITS & LICENSES

Game and coarse anglers need a license for each rod plus a permit for game waters from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), or from the club or private owners involved. What's ideal for tourists is the Combination Licence/Permit available from DCAL for fishing its waters. ☎ (028) 9025-8825.

For further information about permits and licenses, check at tackle shops where you'll get local knowledge and advice. Outlets in Belfast include:

- **Shankill Fishing Tackle**, 366 Shankill Road, ☎ (028) 9033-0949

- **The Village Tackle Shop**, 55a Newtownbreda Road, ☎ (028) 9049-1916

On Horseback

The **Lagan Valley Equestrian Centre**, Upper Malone Road, Dunmurry, ☎ (028) 9061-4265

The **Birr House Riding Centre**, Craigantlet, Belfast, ☎ (028) 9042-5858

The **Burn Equestrian Club**, six miles (10 km) south of Belfast on the A24, ☎ (028) 9040-2384

The **Ballyknock Riding School**, Hillsborough, ☎ (028) 9269-2144

Horseracing

Down Royal Racecourse, Maze, Lisburn, just 10 miles (16 km) from Belfast, hosts several meetings each year. Check local newspapers or ☎ (028) 9262-1256; www.downroyal.com.

◆ Golf

A number of golf courses welcome visitors; some rent clubs, but do phone in advance to check available times and other details.

- **Fortwilliam Golf Club**, ☎ (028) 9037-9770, www.fortwilliam.co.uk
- **Malone Golf Club**, ☎ (028) 9061-2758
- **Belvoir Park Golf Club**, ☎ (028) 9049-1693, www.belvoirparkgolfclub.com
- **Balmoral Golf Club**, ☎ (028) 9038-1514, www.balmoralgolf.com
- **Knock Golf Club**, ☎ (028) 9048-3251
- **Dunmurry Golf Club**, ☎ (028) 9061-0834
- **Mount Ober Golf Club**, ☎ (028) 9079-5666
- **Shandon Park Golf Club**, ☎ (028) 9080-5030
- **Colin Valley Golf Course**, ☎ (028) 9060-1133
- **Gilnahirk Golf Club**, club rental available, ☎ (028) 9044-8477
- **Ormeau Golf Club**, ☎ (028) 9064-0700
- **Lisburn Golf Club**, ☎ (028) 9267-7216, lisburngolfclub@aol.com

- **Royal Belfast Golf Club**, Holywood, Co. Down, ☎ (028) 9042-8165
- **Rockmount Golf Club**, Carryduff, Co. Down, ☎ (028) 9081-2279, www.rockmountgolfclub.co.uk

◆ Recreation

There are a number of leisure centers in the area, where you can swim or enjoy other facilities. Phone in advance for details and to ask about public hours.

- **Avoniel Leisure Centre**, ☎ (028) 9045-1564
- **Andersonstown Leisure Centre**, ☎ (028) 9062 5211
- **Ballysillan Leisure Centre**, ☎ (028) 9039-1040
- **Falls Swim Centre**, ☎ (028) 9050-0510
- **Grove Leisure Centre**, ☎ (028) 9035-1599
- **Maysfield Leisure Centre**, ☎ (028) 9024-1633
- **Shankhill Leisure Centre**, ☎ (028) 9024-1434
- **Olympia Leisure Centre**, ☎ (028) 9023-3369
- **Whiterock Leisure Centre**, ☎ (028) 9023-3239
- **Beechmount Leisure Centre**, ☎ (028) 9032-8631
- There's an indoor tennis arena with four courts, an indoor climbing wall, and a fitness suite at the **Ormeau Embankment**, ☎ (028) 9045-8024.
- In Lisburn, the **Lagan Valley LeisurePlex** has a pool, diving pool, and fitness suite, ☎ (028) 9267-2121; leisureplex@lisburn.gov.uk.

◆ Spectator Sports

You can watch cricket, track and field, and hurling in Belfast during summer, and rugby, Gaelic football, soccer and hockey in winter. Check local newspapers for details, or ask at tourist offices. International and All-Ulster provincial Rugby Union matches take place at **Ravenhill Stadium**. ☎ (028) 9064-9141. International soccer is played at **Windsor Park**, Donegall Avenue, which is also the home venue of Belfast clubs. ☎ (028) 9024-4198.

The most popular city venue for GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association) games is **Casement Park** in Andersonstown, West Belfast, and matches are usually on Sundays.

The Mary Peters Track on the Upper Malone Road is named after Belfast's 1972 Olympic pentathlon gold medalist. Nearby is the Queen's University Club Pavilion where other sports, including soccer, hockey, rugby and Gaelic games, are played. Check local press or call The Sports Council of Northern Ireland. ☎ (028) 9038-1222.

◆ Entertainment

Belfast is a lively city, with lots to do all day and in the evenings. **The Odyssey Arena**, on Queen's Quay, hosts concerts and shows as well as being the home of the Belfast Giants ice hockey team. It also has multi-screen and IMAX cinemas, restaurants, bars and shops. ☎ (028) 9045-1055 for general information, or check local press. www.odysseyarena.com.

Dundonald International Icebowl caters to all abilities and is also the home of the Castlereagh Knights ice hockey team. It also has 10-pin bowling and interactive laser games. ☎ (028) 9048-2611.

The historic and beautiful **Grand Opera House** hosts a varied program that includes touring productions from London's West End. ☎ (028) 9024-1919; info@goh.co.uk; www.goh.co.uk.

The **Lyric Theatre** on Ridgeway Street, near the Ulster Museum, looks out over the Lagan. It's an intimate repertory theater where some of the finest plays written in recent decades were first performed. It also hosts music, dance and comedy. ☎ (028) 9038-1081; info@lyrictheatre.co.uk; www.lyrictheatre.co.uk.

The **Old Museum Arts Centre**, 7 College Square North, near the city center, hosts theater, dance and exhibitions. ☎ (028) 9023-5053; www.oldmuseumartscentre.org.

Ormeau Baths Gallery, Ormeau Avenue, is the city's main space for showing contemporary art, and always worth a visit. Open Tuesday-Saturday, 10 am-6 pm. Admission free. ☎ (028) 9032-1402.

For information on what's happening check the local press, tourist offices, or online www.gotobelfast.com.

◆ Where to Stay

Hotels

☆☆☆ All rooms at **Jurys Inn** accommodate up to three adults or two adults and two children. It's excellent value and is very close to all

ACCOMMODATIONS

$ . . . . . under $60
$$. $61-120
$$$. $121-182
$$$$. $183-243
$$$$$. . . . . over $244

the attractions of the city. **The Arches Restaurant** is open for breakfast and dinner, table d'hôte and à la carte, and **The Inn Pub** is ideal for a light meal or drink. There's a public car park nearby. Fisherwick Place, Great Victoria Street. Room rates $ per person, sharing. ☎ (028) 9053-3500; fax 9053-3511; jurysinnbelfast@jurysdoyle.com; www.jurysdoyle.com.

☆☆☆ This **Days Hotel** is the largest in Northern Ireland, with 244 bedrooms. It's excellent value, right in the center of the city on Hope Street close to the Glengall Street Bus and Rail Station, yet guests park free. The **Windsor Restaurant** offers snacks and meals at reasonable prices and there's a spacious bar. Rates per room cheapest at weekends, $$, also specials for over 55s. Breakfast available. ☎ (028) 9024-2494; mail@dayshotelbelfast.com, www.dayshotelbelfast.activehotels.com.

☆☆ **Belfast City Travelodge** is on Brunswick Street behind Great Victoria Street, so very central. Family rooms accommodate two adults and two children under 16. The **Bar Café** serves meals and snacks, with beers and wines available. Rate per room $$. ☎ (028) 9033-3555, fax 9023-2999; www.travelodge.co.uk.

☆☆ **Crescent Town House** is on Lower Crescent on Botanic Avenue, opposite the Botanic Station. It's in an attractive 19th-century building and is a friendly place to stay, each of its 17 rooms individually decorated. The **Metro** brasserie offers an early-bird menu from 5:45-7:15pm Mon-Fri and 5:30-6:45pm on Sundays, has an à la carte menu, and caters to vegetarians; the **Bar/Twelve**, which serves lunch, is equally popular with hotel guests and locals alike. Rates per room from $$ including breakfast. ☎ (028) 9032-3349, fax 9032-0646; info@crescenttownhouse.com, www.crescenttownhouse.com.

Hostels

The **Linen House Hostel** on Kent Street, ☎ (028) 9058-6400, and **Arnie's Backpackers** on Fitzwilliam Street, ☎ (028) 9024-2867, both belong to the IHH (Independ-

ent Holiday Hostels of Ireland). There's also the **Belfast International Hostel** at 22 Donegall Road. ☎ (028) 9032-4733; info@hini.org.uk.

For additional listings, pick up a copy of the free booklet, *Budget Accommodation*, from the tourist board offices, or check online.

USEFUL CONTACTS

- **Bed & Breakfast Association Northern Ireland**, ☎ (028) 7082-3823, www.tourismireland.com
- **Northern Ireland Farm & Country Holidays**, ☎ (028) 8284-1325; www.nifcha
- **Northern Ireland Self-Catering Association**, ☎ (028)9077-6174; info@nischa.com; www.nischa.com
- **Cottage Holidays** to rent, www.cottagesinireland.com
- **Activities in the countryside**, www.countryside-recreation.com

RV Parks & Camping

☆☆☆ **Dundonald Touring Caravan Park**, 111 Old Dundonald Road, is part of the Dundonald Leisure Park, and is open from Easter to October 31. ☎ (028) 9080-9100; www.castlereagh.gov.uk.

☆ **Jordanstown Lough Shore Park** is five miles north of Belfast on the A2 at Newtownabbey and is open all year, with booking essential from October to March. Note that it does not have tent spaces. ☎ (028) 9034-0000; info@newtownabbey.gov.uk; www.newtownabbey.gov.uk. In summer (May to September), call for bookings on weekdays between 9am and 4:30pm, ☎ (028) 9034-0060; in winter (October to April) call on weekdays until 2pm (after hours call mobile, ☎ 07775- 687356).

◆ Where to Eat

Kelly's Cellars is one of the most historic pubs in the city – it's where the United Irishmen met in the 18th century – and has a wonderful atmosphere. Serving great food, and with music, it's on Bank Street off Royal Avenue.

The Crown Liquor Saloon has to be the most famous hostelry in Belfast. It's on Great Victoria Street, right in the center of town. It's

owned by the National Trust and dates back to the time of Queen Victoria, with an unforgettable interior lit by gaslamps, and with cozy little paneled private rooms. Try a traditional Ulster dish here like champ (delicious mashed potatoes) and sausages. Or just have a drink, of course. Open Monday-Saturday, 11:30 am-12:30 am; Sunday, 12:30-10 pm. ☎ (028) 9027-9901, www.nationaltrust.org.uk.

The Cellar Restaurant in Belfast Castle, overlooking the city, is open every day serving snacks, lunch and dinner. The food is very good and prices are reasonable, and it's in a memorable setting, with a Victorian atmosphere of narrow paved streets, shop fronts and gas lights. ☎ (028) 9077-6925; www.belfastcastle.co.uk.

Harry Ramsden's, in the Yorkgate Complex on York Street, offers traditional fish and chips (and other dishes). Full license, open Monday-Thursday, 11:30 am-10:30 pm, Friday and Saturday, 11:30 am-11 pm, and Sunday, 12:30-10:30 pm. ☎ (028) 9074-9222.

There are **Esquires** coffee houses in four locations around Belfast. They are all very relaxing and welcoming, and have Internet kiosks. There's a choice of drinks as well as excellent coffee, and breakfast, snacks, hot meals and delicious cakes available.

- ***22-24 Rosemary Street*** *(corner of Lombard Street), open daily and until 9pm Thursday (totally non-smoking);* ☎ *(028) 9031-9826*
- ***19 Wellington Place****, open same hours,* ☎ *(028) 9024-8054*
- ***Unit 15-16, Great Northern Mall****, Great Victoria Street, is open daily until 8pm,* ☎ *(028) 9024-1547*
- ***90 Botanic Avenue*** *is open until 11pm every night,* ☎ *(028) 9023-9239.*

Antrim's Causeway Coast & Glens

County Antrim is absolutely beautiful. Its coast, from the busy port of **Larne** to the resorts of **Portrush** and **Portstewart**, is dotted with beaches and rocky inlets. Inland, between **Glenarm** and **Ballycastle**, there are nine steep-sided glens, which descend from the inland plateau to the sea.

In addition to wonderful scenery, with forests, rivers and waterfalls, the landscape is dominated by spectacular ruins of fortresses built by Gaelic chieftains and Norman invaders.

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The region called Causeway Coast and Glens takes in not just **County Antrim** but also part of neighboring **Londonderry**.

Among the sights to see are the famous **Giant's Causeway** and nearby **Bushmills**, the world's oldest licensed whiskey distillery. Activities include fishing, sailing, diving, horse riding, cycling, walking, or just exploring.

Glenshane Pass

Getting Here & Getting Around

◆ By Bus & Rail

Ulsterbus Ltd., part of Translink, runs services throughout the area; for information on buses or trains, ☎ (028) 9066-6630, www.translink.co.uk. **The Causeway Rambler** (Ulsterbus 376) runs between Bushmills and Carrick-a-Rede from mid-June to mid-September. ☎ (028) 7032-5400; www.translink.co.uk.

The Antrim Coaster Bus takes you along the coast from Larne to Coleraine, daily in summer, Monday-Saturday the rest of year, ☎ (028) 2827-2345.

Northern Ireland Railways, part of Translink, operates suburban services from Belfast's Great Victoria and Central stations to Larne, and to Coleraine and Derry in neighboring Co. Londonderry; ☎ (028) 9066-6630, www.translink.co.uk.

AN ADVENTURE ON WHEELS

From April to October, you can travel the two miles (3.2 km) between Bushmills and the Giant's Causeway by a delightful **narrow gauge steam railway**. ☎ (028) 2073-2844; www.giantscausewayrailway.org, infogcbr@btconnect.com.

◆ By Road

The A2 runs along the coast from Newtownabbey, northeast of Belfast, to Carrickfergus, Larne, through the seaside villages of Glenarm, Carnlough, Waterfoot, Cushendall, to Ballycastle, and then on through Portrush to Coleraine in Co. Londonderry.

Inland, the M2 and then the M22 take you from near Newtownabbey to Antrim Town and Randalstown. From there, you take the A26 to Ballymena, where a second section of the M2 bypasses the town. Return to the A26 for Ballymoney and on to Coleraine.

Antrim's Causeway Coast & Glens

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NOT TO SCALE

1. Glenarm
2. Glencloy
3. Glenariff
4. Glenballyeamon
5. Glenaan
6. Glencorp
7. Glendun
8. Glenshesk
9. Glentaisie
10. Giants' Causeway
11. Bushmills Distillery
12. Martello Towers
13. Sperrin Mountains

Ferries from the UK

To explore the central plateau, take the A42 up from Carnlough to Ballymena, or the A44 from Ballycastle, which brings you through Armoy and then on to the A26.

Tourist Information

Offices are generally open year-round, Monday-Friday, 9 am-5 pm; Easter to September, also open on Saturdays, 10 am-4 pm; and in July and August on Sundays, 1-4 pm.

In **Antrim**, 16 High Street, ☎ (028) 9442-8331; fax 9448-7844; info@antrim.gov.uk; www.antrim.gov.uk

Larne Tourist Information Centre is just off Main Street on Narrow Gauge Road. ☎/fax (028) 2826-0088; larnetourism@btconnect.com; www.larne.gov.uk.

In **Ballycastle**, the **Tourist Information Centre** is in Sheskburn House, 7 Mary Street. ☎ (028) 2076-2024; fax 2076-2515; ballycastle@nitic.net.

Portrush Tourist Information Office (seasonal opening) is in Dunluce Center. ☎ (028) 7082-3333.

Antrim Cliffs

Carrickfergus Tourist Information Centre, 11 Antrim Street, open all year, ☎ (028) 9335-8049; fax 9335-0350; touristinfo@carrickfergus.org www.carrickfergus.org.

Causeway Coast and Antrim Glens. ☎ (028) 7032-4570; fax 7032-7720; mail@causewaycoastandglens.com; www.causewaycoastandglens.com.

In **Ballymena**, 76 Church Street, ☎ (028) 2563-8494

In **Bushmills**, 44 Causeway Road, ☎ (028) 2073-1855

Sightseeing

◆ Carrickfergus

Carrickfergus Castle

The area is perfect for a drive or cycle, stopping to explore as you go. The walled garrison town of **Carrickfergus** is eight miles (13 km) north of Belfast on the A2. **Carrickfergus Castle**, built in 1180, is on the seafront, the largest and the best-preserved castle in the North. It was here that William of Orange landed on his way to the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. The castle is worth a visit, and also has a program of interesting events. Open Monday-Saturday, 10 am-6 pm, Sunday, 2-6 pm. October-March it closes at 4 pm. ☎ (028) 9335-1273.

US President **Andrew Jackson's** parents emigrated from Carrickfergus in 1765. In a reconstructed cottage in nearby Boneybefore, there's a museum. An exhibition on the US Rangers, whose first battalion was raised here, is in its grounds. Open April-late October, phone for times. ☎ (028) 9335-8049.

◆ Larne

Larne is 18 miles (29 km) north of Belfast and is both a busy port, with ferries arriving from Scotland and England, and a thriving market town.

The town has a simple layout, dominated by it's Main Street with a mix of chain stores, independent shops, bars and restaurants. In **Curran Park** there's a statue of a family on their way to an emigrant ship. *Friends Goodwill* was the name of the first ship to sail for Boston from Larne in 1717, full of

Emigrants Memorial, Curran Park, Larne

Ulster-Scots, mostly Presbyterians. Thousands followed, bound for New York, Philadelphia and other American cities.

Larne is developing an **Ulster-American Heritage Trail** – ask at the Larne Tourist Information Centre (see above) for details.

◆ The Nine Glens of Antrim

The glens are all beautiful and enthralling, but do take great care when exploring, as the roads winding through them are narrow and steep in places and details can be hidden by mist as you climb. They are usually pleasantly free of traffic.

Going south to north, they start with **Glenarm** – *the glen of the army* – nine miles (14 km) north of Larne on the A2 coast road at the picturesque village of the same name.

Two miles (3.2 km) farther north is **Glencloy** – *the glen of the hedges* – with the charming little fishing port of Carnlough at its foot.

The best known of the glens comes next, **Glenariff** – *arable*, or fertile – which meets the sea at Waterfoot.

At the foot of **Glenballyemon** –*Edwardstown* – and the Sea of Moyle is delightful Cushendall, known as the Capital of the Glens. This has been designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The warrior poet Ossian, a legendary figure, is said to be buried in the next glen, **Glenaan**, which means *rush lights* or *colt'sfoot*.

Nearby is **Glencorp** – *the glen of the slaughtered* – running parallel to the coast road from Cushendall to Cushendun (both of these villages are on the sea and very pretty). The next green glen is **Glendun** – *of the brown river* – where the road from Cushendun crosses the River Glendun by a red stone viaduct and travels over a high plateau to Ballycastle.

East of that town is the **Glenshesk** – *glen of sedge* – which sweeps towards the ruined Bonamargy Friary. On the other side of Ballycastle is the last of the nine glens – **Glentaisie** – named for Princess Taisie, bride of the future King Congal of Ulster, to whom the land was given as a wedding gift.

◆ Ballycastle

Ballycastle has a very attractive seafront, with tennis courts, and a Blue Flag beach, a short walk across the River Maigey. Ireland's old-

est fair, **Ould Lammas**, has been held here since 1606, on the last Monday and Tuesday of August. It's a lively resort town, with attractive houses built in the mid-1700s.

Ballypatrick Forest, five miles (eight km) southeast of Ballycastle on the A2, has a waymarked Wildlife Trail. Open daily year-round, 9am to dusk. A scenic five-mile drive through peatland forest is open daily in summer and on weekends from Easter to October. You pay a small fee per car. ☎ (028) 2955-6000.

Ballypatrick Forest Road,
(Forest Service NI)

Do take at least a day-trip from Ballycastle to **Rathlin Island**, which is just over six miles (10 km) off the coast. Nowhere is it more than a mile across and, with fewer than 100 inhabitants and even fewer cars, the island is ideal for walking and cycling. Home to 175 species of birds, it's also popular with botanists, divers and sea-anglers, and there's lots to see, including seals sleeping on the rocks.

Rathlin Island & Lighthouse,
(Conor Sweeney)

You take a 45-minute boat trip from Ballycastle to get there. The service runs four times a day, June to September, twice daily from October to May, advance booking advised. ☎ (028) 2076-9299. www.calmac.co.uk. You can take your bike for a small fee, tour the island by Irene's Minibus, ☎ (028) 2076-3949, or hire a bike, ☎ (028) 2076-3954.

◆ The Giant's Causeway

Giant's Causeway

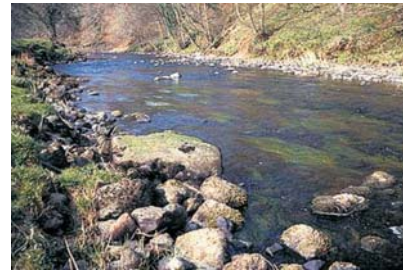
Continue along the A2 from Ballycastle, passing Whitepark Bay, and you come to the Giant's Causeway, a World Heritage Site in the care of the National Trust, www.nationaltrust.org.uk.

The Causeway is a cluster of black basalt pillars formed 60 million years ago by volcanic activity. It is in a National Nature Reserve and has also been designated an Area of Special Scientific Interest. The site is associated with the mythological giant Finn MacCool; it is open all year and is so popular with visitors that it's busy even during winter. You can walk from the Visitor Centre or take the little bus for a small fee (free if you're a member of the National Trust).

You pay to park and the fee goes towards maintaining and developing visitor facilities all along the coast. There's also a Visitor Centre with audio-visual show (for which you pay an extra charge), a shop and café. Stones and coastal path open all year; shop and café open daily most of year, but only on weekends in winter. ☎ (028) 2073-1855; causeway@nitic.net; www.nationaltrust.org.uk.

◆ Bushmills

The village of Bushmills is a good place to stop and take a walk or even stay. It's been designated a "conservation village," dedicated to conserving its natural ecology. The village stands on the **River**



River Bush (Robert Rosell)

Bush, where several mills used to process everything from spades to flax, timber to corn.

Bushmills is famous as the home of the world's oldest licensed whiskey distillery, founded in 1608. You can take a one-hour guided tour, which includes a tasting. Open April-October, Monday-Saturday, 9:30 am-5:30 pm, Sunday from noon; rest of the year, phone for hours. ☎ (028) 2073-1521; www.bushmills.com.

About three miles (4.8 km) from Portrush you come upon what must be one of the most romantic sights in Ireland, the ruins of **Dunluce Castle**, once the stronghold of the MacDonnells. They're on an absolutely breathtaking cliff with waves crashing below. Open daily, phone for hours; ☎ (028) 2073-1938; www.ehsni.gov.uk.

◆ Portrush

With a very attractive location on the peninsula of Ramore Head, Portrush has long been a popular family resort and has lots of guesthouses, hotels, restaurants and pubs. It has two sandy beaches and a harbor and, despite modern amusements, retains an atmosphere of times past, with some lovely houses overlooking the sea.

*Be lazy and take the **Portrush Puffer**, a road passenger train, around the resort; it only operates in July and August; ☎ (028) 7032-5400.*

The **Portrush Countryside Centre** houses an exhibition on the natural history of the coast. Open June through August, admission free. ☎ (028) 7082-3600. Next to it is the **Nature Reserve**, where the rocks on the seashore have thousands of fossil impressions. Offshore you can see The Skerries, a line of little islands about two miles (3.2 km) away; in summer you can take a boat trip around the islands from the harbor. Open daily, July and August.

◆ Antrim Town

Exploring inland is equally rewarding. Antrim Town stands on the northeastern corner of Lough Neagh, just a few miles from Belfast International Airport. It's a prosperous town, and it has expanded dra-

Antrim Castle Gardens

matically in recent years, so little of its historic core survives. What does remain includes the remarkably intact **Round Tower** (free access all year). There is also part of a tower of **Antrim Castle**. It's worth visiting Antrim just to see the **Castle Gardens**, now restored to their original form. The gardens were designed by André Le Notre (1613-70) – famous for his formal gardens at Versailles, outside Paris. Features here include ponds, as well as riverside and woodland walks. The **Clotworthy Arts Centre**, which always has something of interest going on, is in the former coach house, and also houses displays about the gardens. Free admission, open daily; ☎ (028) 9448-1338.

The childhood home of Alexander Irvine (1863-1941), who became a missionary on the Bowery in New York, is called **Pogue's Entry** and is on Church Street, Antrim. It's open during the main tourist season; phone Clotworthy Arts Centre (above) for information.

On the B96 from Ballymena to Portglenone, you come to **Cullybackey** and the ancestral home of the 21st US President, Chester Alan Arthur (1881-85). His father, a Baptist clergyman, emigrated from here in 1816. The restored farmhouse is up a lane through potato fields; watch out for the sharp turn on the road. Open Easter-September, Monday-Friday, 10:30 am-5 pm, Saturday to 4 pm. ☎ (028) 2563-8494.

Adventures

◆ On Foot

Allow plenty of time to explore at least portions of the Causeway Coast and Glens on foot. A great place for a walk is the **Carnfunnock Country Park**, three miles (4.8 km) north of Larne on the A2 coast road. It covers 473 acres (189 hectares), with mixed woodland and gardens. There are

also interesting signs of the original estate, which belonged to Lord and Lady Dixon, with a walled garden, icehouse, home farm and private church. There's also a nine-hole public golf course where you can rent clubs. ☎ (028) 2827-0541, (summer) 2826-0088; mcwilliams@larne.gov.uk.

Carnlough is a friendly little fishing port with a beach. In the early 19th century a railway was developed to transport limestone from the quarries above the village to the harbor. The railway bridge dominates Carnlough. The old railway line is now a walkway leading to the **Cranny Falls**, and part of the **Ulster Way** long-distance walking route. The area around the Falls is a **nature reserve** with grassland and wetland habitats.

On the A43 to Ballymena, signposted off the coast road at Waterfoot, is the **Glenariff Forest Park Visitor Centre**. It's a good place to start exploring the park, with waterfalls, wooden walkways, and great views. Open daily from 10 am, with a small fee. ☎ (028) 2955-6000.

There are waymarked paths around the village of **Cushendun**, with its distinctive white cottages, and into the surrounding woods.

At **Ballintoy**, west of Ballycastle, you walk a mile along a coastal path, then – if you dare – cross the precarious **Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge** over an 80-foot chasm to a what's described as a peaceful little island with lovely sea views. It's run by the National Trust, and is very popular with those more daring than myself. The bridge is open from April to September, depending on weather. You pay a small fee to park. Tea room and exhibition open May, Saturday-Sunday 1-5 pm; June-August daily, 12 to 6 pm; ☎ (028) 2073-1582, www.ntni.org.uk or www.nationaltrust.org.uk.

The North Antrim Coastal Path runs for 14 miles (22.4 km) from the Giant's Causeway to Carrick-a-Rede.

The two miles (3.2 km) of golden beach at **Portstewart** are protected by dunes, a haven for wildflowers and butterflies, and are in the care of the National Trust. There's a waymarked **nature trail** to follow, accessible all year. Take the **cliff path**, part of the Ulster Way, from Portrush to Portstewart to get there. It's worth a visit to the **Antrim Information Centre**, 16 High Street, ☎ (028) 9442-8331, info@antrim.gov.uk.

Waymarked Ways

These are long-distance routes which are signposted with information panels at key points.

Causeway Coast Way, 33 mile (52km) walk along the dramatic North Atlantic coastline from Portstewart to Ballycastle.

Moyle Way, 20 mile (32 km) walk from Ballycastle to Glenariff Forest Park near Waterfoot.

Guidebooks with maps for each Way are available at any Tourist Information Centre, or see www.countrysiderecreation.com, www.waymarkedways.com.

Walking Tour

During July, August & September, regular guided walking tours start at the **Antrim Information Centre**, 16 High Street, or you can pick up an illustrated *Heritage Trail* leaflet from there and follow it yourself. Details, ☎ (028) 9442-8331, info@antrim.gov.uk.

◆ On Horseback

There are many riding centers; these are just a few of them. **Watertop Open Farm**, six miles (10 km) east of Ballycastle, offers pony rides for children and trekking for more experienced riders. Farm activities, including shearing, plus walks, boating, fishing. Caravan and camp site. Open daily from May Day Holiday to end August. ☎ (028) 2076-2576; fax 2076-2175; watertopfarm@aol.com.

Maddybenny Riding Centre and Stud is two miles (3.2 km) from Portrush, three miles (4.8 km) from Coleraine, and also offers accommodation. ☎ (028) 7082-3394; www.maddybenny.com.

Castlehill Equestrian Centre, off the A26 and two miles (3.2 km) from Ballymena, has riding and jumping classes for all ages, as well as cross-country riding, all year. ☎ (028) 2588-1222; fax 2586-2006.

Connell Hill Riding Centre, 48 Drumsough Road, Randalstown, ☎ (028) 9447-2632; gillian@connellhill.co.uk.

The **Islandmagee Riding Centre** is on Brown's Bay Road. ☎ (028) 9338-2108; www.islandmagee.co.uk.

◆ On Water

Fishing

The entire area is blessed with a huge choice for anyone interested in fishing, including the eastern shores of Lough Neagh, the Causeway Coast, the nine glens, the coast road, and many rivers and lakes. The River Bann, which drains Lough Neagh into the Atlantic, is a major attraction, its lower stretch popular for rod fishing.

Ask at your accommodation or at tackle and bait outlets about licenses, permits, boat rental, and ghillies (guides). Tourist Information Centres will also advise you.

Watersports

Portrush is a mecca for surfers, windsurfers, and bodyboarders. **Troggs Surf Shop** at 88 Main Street is where you'll get detailed information and can rent equipment; ☎ (028) 7082-5476; www.troggs.com.

◆ In Golf

There are more than 30 golf courses in the area, some open to visitors every day, others on certain days or times, so it is advisable to phone in advance. The following is a selection.

- ***Royal Portrush Golf Club*** *has two 18-hole links courses at Dunluce and Valley, a mile east of Portrush.* ☎ *(028) 7028-3335; info@royalportrushgolfclub.com; www.royalportrushgolfclub.com.*
- ***Ballycastle Golf Club****,* ☎ *(028) 2076-2536.*
- ***The Cairndhu Golf Club****, four miles (6.4 km) north of Larne,* ☎*/fax (028) 2858-3324.*
- ***Carrickfergus Golf Club****,* ☎ *(028) 9336-3713.*
- *There's also the nine-hole* ***Bentra Municipal Golf Course*** *at Carrickfergus.* ☎ *(028) 9337-8996.*
- *Among nine-hole seaside courses in the area are* ***Cushendall Golf Club****,* ☎ *(028) 217-7131;* ***Bushfoot Golf Club****, a mile north of Bushmills,* ☎ *(028) 2073-1317; and the* ***Larne Golf Club*** *on the Islandmagee Peninsula,* ☎ *(028) 9338-2228; fax 9338-2088.*

Entertainment

With the many festivals in the area, and welcoming pubs in every village and town, there is much to keep visitors happily entertained. In Larne there is a **Leisure Centre**, which includes a theater, pools and spa, squash courts, and fitness equipment. ☎ (028) 2826-0478. In Portrush during the summer there are shows in the **Town Hall**, and the two screen **Playhouse Cinema** is open all year. **Barry's Amusement Park** has been at Portrush for 50 years, with outdoor rides and indoor entertainment, and **Waterworld** has pools and water slides. ☎ (028) 7082-2001.

Where to Stay

◆ Hotels

For accommodations pricing guide, see page 462.

☆☆☆ **The Londonderry Arms Hotel**, Carnlough, is on the A2 coast road. It's run by the O'Neill family, who are very knowledgeable about Antrim, and you can hire bikes from them or buy permits for fishing. Rarely have I been made as welcome as I was here. The hotel, which has spacious old-fashioned bedrooms, charming and helpful staff, and an open fire in the sitting room, is named after Marchioness Londonderry, and was once owned by Winston Churchill.

The food is outstanding, with mouth-watering brown bread, soups, locally caught fish, and delicious meat and vegetarian choices. The bar is popular with locals. This would be a great place to enjoy an Ulster Fry (made from eggs, sausages, tomatoes and mushrooms) for breakfast. The hotel belongs to the Irish Country Hotels marketing group. B & B £50 sharing, $$. ☎ (028) 2888-5255; fax 2888-5263; info@glensofantrim.com or info@irishcountryhotels.com.

☆☆☆ **The Comfort Hotel** in Portrush is centrally located and overlooks the sea. It was voted Hotel of the Year in 2005 in the Northern Ireland Tourism Awards. It offers excellent value, its 50 rooms spacious enough to accommodate up to two adults and two children. Its **Counties Café Bar & Restaurant** is ideal for a snack or meal. Rates,

per room, only $$. International reservations, ☎ 1-800-500-600; (028) 7082-6100; fax 7082-6160; info@comforthotelportrush.com; www.comforthotelportrush.com.

☆☆ **The Causeway Hotel**, owned by the National Trust, must have one of the best locations anywhere, looking out over the sea a few steps from the Giant's Causeway. It's been there since 1836 and has retained an atmosphere of old grandeur while offering contemporary comfort. B & B rates from $ sharing. ☎ (028) 2073-1210; fax 2073-2552; reception@giants-causeway-hotel.com; www.causeway-hotel.com.

◆ On Rathlin Island

The Manor House, overlooking Church Bay, is owned by the National Trust, and offers B&B accommodation all year, with evening meals and packed lunches if prearranged. $ sharing. ☎ (028) 2076-3964. Alternatively, you can stay at the **Guest House**, ☎ (028) 2076-3917; at **Soerneog View Hostel**, ☎ (028) 2076-3954; or in the **Camping Barn**, ☎ (028) 2076-3948.

◆ Cottages for Rent

The North Antrim Community Network has leased derelict properties and renovated them as the **Antrim Glens Cottages**. These make a comfortable and attractive setting for your vacation. You can rent them for weekends at certain times of year, or by the week. For a look at the properties, ☎ (028) 2177-2990; fax 2177-2129; cottages@antrim.net; www.antrim.net/cottages, or www.causewaycoastandglens.com, or ask at a tourist office.

◆ Hostels

Castle Hostel on Quay Road, Ballycastle. ☎ (028) 2076-2337; info@castlehostel.com.

Sheep Island Hostel, Main Street, Ballintoy, Ballycastle. ☎ (028) 2076-9393; sheepsisland@hotmail.com.

Both are members of the IHH and are open all year. For details of others, pick up the free booklet, *Budget Accommodation in Northern Ireland*, from the tourism board, or check online.

◆ RV Parks & Camping

Some have spaces for tents, but always phone in advance as space can be limited, especially in the summer.

☆☆☆☆☆ **The Drumaheglis Marina & Caravan Park**, near Ballymoney, has an on-site water ski school, as well as other watersports and fishing. ☎ (028) 2766-6466; www.ballymoney.gov.uk.

☆☆☆ **The Curran Court**, Larne, ☎ (028) 2827-3797.

☆☆☆ **Sixmilewater Marina and Caravan Park**, a mile from Antrim town, ☎ (028) 9446-4131; abs@antrim.gov.uk.

☆☆☆ **Silvercliffs Holiday Village** overlooks the sea at Ballycastle, with an indoor pool and bar. ☎ (028) 2076-2550.

Watertop Farm is six miles (10 km) east of Ballycastle on a working farm. ☎ (028) 2076-2576; watertopfarm@aol.com.

☆☆☆ **ECOS Centre** is just off the M2 at Ballymena. ☎ (028) 2566-4404; www.ecoscentre.com.

Glenariff Forest Park, ☎ (028) 2955-6000.

☆☆☆ **Cushendall**, ☎ (028) 2177-1699, and ☆☆☆ **Cushendun**, ☎ (028) 2176-1254.

Close to Bushmills are three parks: ☆☆☆☆☆ **Ballyness**, ☎ (028) 2073-2393, info@ballynesscaravanpark.com, www.ballynesscaravanpark.com; ☆☆☆☆ **Bush Caravan Park**, ☎ (028) 2073-1678; ☆☆☆☆ **Portballintrae**, ☎ (028) 2073-1478.

At Portrush there are three to choose from. ☆☆☆☆☆ **Bellemont** is open March to September. ☎ (0280) 7082-3872. ☆☆☆☆ **Ballymacrea** is open all year. ☎ (028) 7082-4507. ☆☆☆ **Carrick Dhu** opens from April to early October. ☎ (028) 7082-3712.

☆☆☆ Carnfunnock Country Park, on coast road near Larne, ☎ (028) 2826-0088/ 2827-0541.

Maguires Strand Caravan Park, near Ballycastle, ☎ (028) 2076-3294.

Where to Eat

The Harbour Bistro, on the quay in Portrush, is very popular with locals and visitors for its award-winning food and welcoming atmosphere. ☎ (028) 7082-2430. Under the same management are the **Harbour Bar**, the **Coast Pasta Pizza Bar** and the **Ramore Wine Bar**, all nearby; www.portrushharbour.co.uk.

The **Custom House Restaurant**, Marine Hotel, North Street, Ballycastle, is on the seafront; open daily 12:30-10 pm with carvery and à la carte dishes featuring local produce. Snacks available from 12:30-9 pm in the **Fairhead Lounge** or **Quay Bar**; music Friday through Sunday. ☎ (028) 2076-2222; info@marinehotel.net; www.marinehotel.net.

Mattie's Meetinghouse, Cairncastle, Larne, is on the B148 a mile inland from the coast, and is one of the oldest pubs in Antrim, with bar food all day, evening dining, and a varied traditional music program. Book ahead to dine in the evenings. ☎ (028) 2858-3252.

Derry

DERRY CENTER

17. Train Station
18. Ulsterbus Station
19. To Amelia Earhart Centre; Foyle Arts Centre Foyle Bridge
20. St. Eugene's Cathedral
21. Bloody Sunday Monument
22. Guild Hall
23. Train Station; Foyle Valley Railway Museum
24. Workhouse Museum & Library
25. Old City (see inset)

OLD CITY

10. Apprentice Boys Memorial Hall
11. Gunners Bastion
12. Cowards Bastion, Hangmans Bastion
13. The Diamond
14. Millennium Complex
15. The Playhouse
16. The Rialto

OLD CITY

1. Magazine Gate, Tower Museum; Waterloo Square
2. Craft Village
3. Water Bastion; Central Library
4. Newgate Bastion
5. Church Bastion
6. St. Columb's Cathedral
7. Double Bastion
8. Royal Bastion, Grand Parade
9. St. Augustine's Church, Palace Street

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Derry City & County Londonderry

Derry is the second largest city in Northern Ireland, and is delightful, standing on a hill on the estuary of the river Foyle, which divides it in two. The area called **Cityside** includes at its core the only intact medieval walled city in Ireland or the British Isles. Facing it across the river is the **Waterside** area.

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- Exploring the County 488
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- Adventures. 491
- Leisure Activities 493
- Where to Stay 494
- Where to Eat 496

Saint Columba founded a monastery here in 546, and the English arrived in 1566 after the revolt led by Shane O'Neill. In 1613 Derry was granted a charter, giving it a mayor and corporation, but "London" was added to its name – a contentious issue ever since, particularly because nationalists are in the majority in the area.

Walls were built in 1613-18 to defend the city; the Siege of Derry (1688-9) was one of the most important events in Irish history.

To those of us who live in Ireland, what someone calls this city – Derry or Londonderry – immediately identifies their affiliations. To be fair, I am calling the city Derry and its county Londonderry.

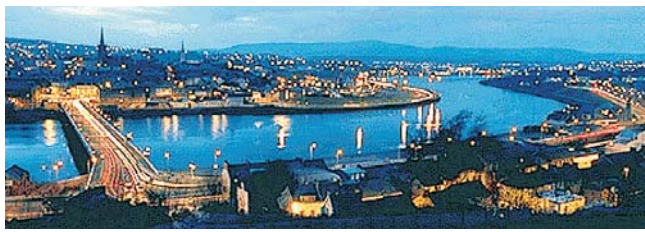
During the 18th and early 19th centuries many people emigrated from here seeking new lives in America, where they founded the colonies of Derry and Londonderry in New Hampshire. They also left for England and for Australia. During the

Along Derry's City Walls
(Sean McClean)

Great Famine (1845-9), emigration expanded to Canada.

During World War II, Derry was a naval- and airbase, with 20,000 sailors and airmen stationed here, and was chosen as the site for the surrender of the German U-boat fleet.

Today, there's an atmosphere of optimism in Derry and the city buzzes with life. The peace process has brought investment, and many new buildings; these fit in remarkably well with the Georgian townhouses and grand public buildings, including the Guildhall, and the smaller houses and shops cramming its narrow side streets. It's an artistic city, with theaters, galleries and other cultural centers and a number of annual festivals. The people of Derry, with their gentle accent, are very welcoming.



River Foyle at Night

County Londonderry

A flat plain extends eastwards from the city, skirting Lough Foyle, to **Limavady** on the River Roe and the university city of **Coleraine** on the River Bann. To the north is the Atlantic coast with marvelous beaches, including the longest on the whole island, **Magilligan**, and popular resorts like **Castlerock** and **Portstewart**.

Inland, there are hills, glens and river valleys, backed by the Sperrin Mountains, with well-wooded areas, a legacy of the Plantation. Across Lough Foyle is County Donegal in the Republic and that county's land border is just outside Derry City.

Getting Here & Getting Around

◆ By Air

City of Derry Airport is at Eglinton, four miles (6.4 km) east of the city on the A2, and has direct flights from Scotland, England and Dublin. ☎ (028) 7181-0784; fax 7181-1426; info@cityofderryairport.com; www.cityofderryairport.com.

◆ Rail & Bus

The city has good rail service operated by **Northern Ireland Railways**, connecting the main towns to Belfast, and from there to the Republic. **Ulsterbus** runs services throughout the city and beyond, including the airport. Its Maiden City Flyer links Derry to Belfast. For all timetable and route information, by train or bus, call ☎ (028) 9066-6630, www.translink.co.uk. The **Ulsterbus** depot is on Foyle Street close to the Tourist Information Centre. Open Monday-Friday, 6 am-6 pm, Saturday until 5:30 pm; limited hours on Sunday. ☎ (028) 7126-2261; fax 7137-4442.

Waterside Railway Station is across the river close to Craigavon Bridge; the ticket office is open Monday-Saturday, 7:30 am-5 pm, Sunday 4:15-7 pm; the station is open longer hours. ☎ (028) 7134-2228; fax 7131-1221.

Remember, all over Northern Ireland, check www.translink.com with all public transport inquiries.

◆ By Road

Derry City is reached by the M2/A6 from Belfast via Antrim and Dungiven; the A2/A37 from Coleraine and Limavady; the N13 from Letterkenny, Co. Donegal in the Republic; the N15 from counties Sligo and Galway in the Republic; and the A5 from Dublin via Omagh and Strabane.

Tourist Information

You can't miss the **Derry Visitor & Convention Bureau** as it's in a very prominent position on Foyle Street as you enter the city with the river on your right. The bureau stocks information leaflets and brochures covering the whole island, most free, and you can also book accommodations, change money and buy gifts here. Monday-Friday, 9 am-5 pm, year-round; 10 am-5 pm from mid-March through October, and later hours from July through September. ☎ (028) 7126-7284; info@derryvisitor.com; www.derryvisitor.com.

Other locations are:

Railway Road, Coleraine, ☎ (028) 7034-4723

Council Offices, Connell Street, Limavady, ☎ (028) 7776-0307

Magherafelt, The Bridewell, 6 Church Street, ☎ (028) 7963-1510

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

The Heritage Library, 14 Bishop Street, Derry, is a genealogy center that undertakes research for a fee. ☎ (028) 7126-9792; fax 7136-0921; niancestors@btclick.com.

Sightseeing

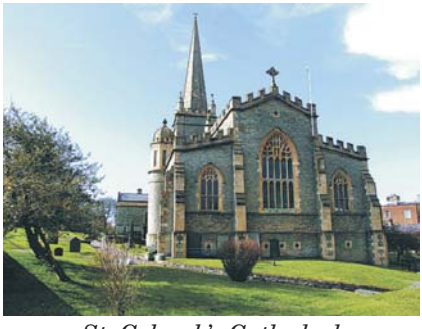
◆ Derry City

Shipquay Street
(Sean McClean)

Before doing anything else, take a walk along the walls of the medieval city. The circuit is a mile long, and you get a good look at the layout of the city below you, including Free Derry corner at the entrance to the Bogside, where in January 1972 one of the most controversial events of the Troubles took place – known as Bloody Sunday – when 14 people on a civil rights march were shot dead by the British Army.

The original gates are **Shipquay**, **Butcher**, **Bishop** and **Ferryquay**, the latter closed by the apprentice boys against the army of King James II. Three other gates were added later – **Magazine**, **Castle** and **New Gate**. The scale of the city within the walls will surprise you – it's tiny, with all roads converging on the central square called the Diamond, and you can explore it easily.

St. Columb's Anglican Cathedral, built in 1633, is worth a stop. Open year-round; there's a small admission fee, and tours are available. ☎ (028) 7126-7313; www.stcolumbs-cathedral.org.



St. Columb's Cathedral

Don't miss **The Tower Museum**, inside the city walls at the Magazine Gate, and you'll see why it has won awards. Open daily, July-August; rest of year, Monday-Friday only. ☎ (028) 7137-2411; fax 7137-7633; tower.museum@derrycity.gov.uk.

The Guildhall,the civic center for the city, is just outside the walls near Shipquay Gate. It's open Monday-Friday, 9 am-5 pm; admission free.

Cross the river by the Craigavon Bridge and at 23 Glendermott Road in Waterside you find the **Workhouse Museum** – a slight misnomer as it also covers the city's role in World War II. Admission free. Open July and August, Monday-Saturday, 10 am-4:30 pm; rest of year, Monday-Thursday and Saturday only. ☎ (028) 7131-8328.

Guided Tour

You can take a guided tour of the walled city, starting from the Tourist Information Centre. Ask in the Centre for details. Alternatively, pick up a map-leaflet there and follow the tour yourself. You can also download it from www.derryvisitor.com.

Parking

The easiest place to park is in one of the multi-storeys next to the Tourist Information Centre or across the road next to the Foyleside Shopping Centre. There are other car parks, but those two are well signposted so try them first.

◆ Exploring the County

Head east out of the city by Shore Road, cross the Foyle Bridge taking the A2, and a mile and half later off the B194, north of the city, you come to **Ballyarnett Country Park** and the **Amelia Earhart Centre**. Watch for signs. It recalls the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic, who landed here in 1932. Cottage open weekdays; free, call for times. **The Wildlife Sanctuary** is open Monday-Friday, 9 am-dusk, Saturday and Sunday from 10 am, and you're asked for a donation. ☎ (028) 7135-4040; ameliaearhart@compuserve.com.

Main Street, Limavady
(Jochen Lueg)

Limavady, 13 miles (21 km) farther on, is a bustling market town founded in the early 1600s. Some historic features survive, including an elegant bridge (1700) and Georgian buildings on Main Street. The town is in an attractive part of the Sperrins region on the river Roe, surrounded by mountains to the north and southeast.

At number 51 Main Street, Limavady, lived Jane Ross, who wrote down the tune of the Londonderry Air*, which she'd heard played by a passing fiddler. The song is now best known globally as* Danny Boy.

North of Limavady is the six-mile-long beach of **Magilligan**, with a Martello Tower, built during the Napoleonic Wars of the 19th century, overlooking a **National Nature Reserve**, which is always accessible.

One of the best-known images of Northern Ireland is the **Mussenden Temple** at Castlerock, overlooking Magilligan Strand. This elegant building with a domed roof was a "summer library" for the eccentric

Anglican Bishop of Derry, Frederick August Hervey, who was also Earl of Bristol. It was built in 1783, and now belongs to the National Trust. His nearby residence, **Downhill Castle**, was last used by US troops during WWII; it is now in ruins. Its grounds, with gardens and a glen walk, are open dawn to dusk all year; www.nationaltrust.org.uk.

Mussenden Temple is open June-August, daily, 11 am-6 pm; September open weekends; 17 March-May, open weekends and public holidays only. You pay a charge per car. ☎ (028) 7084-8728.

Mussenden Temple, Castlerock,
(Jochen Lueg)

South of Coleraine on the A54 is **Bellaghy**, where Nobel Prize-winning poet **Seamus Heaney** was born. This Plantation town was built around 1618 and, like the others, had to have a "bawn" or fortified enclosure. One of the houses at the **Bellaghy Bawn** has been restored, with tours and exhibits about local history and contemporary poetry, including that of Seamus Heaney. Open year-round, daily in season, call for hours. ☎ (028) 7938-6812.

Bellaghy Bawn is linked with other centers that tell the story of the Flight of the Earls and Ulster's history. They are: ***Manor Lodge*** *at Moneymore nearby, ☎ (028) 8674-8910;* ***The Ulster Plantation Centre*** *at Draperstown on the B41 a few miles farther north, ☎ (028) 7962-7800; the* ***Tower Museum****, Derry; and heritage centers in Co. Donegal; www.theflightoftheearls.com.*

Entertainment

Visitors enjoy Derry's creative and cultural atmosphere. The city has lots of pubs, many historic, and others built in recent years, some offering music and other entertainment. Remember, you don't have to drink alcohol to enjoy the pub experience.

It's a city of festivals including the St. Patrick's Day Celebrations, Guth an Earraigh/Irish Language Festival, the City of Derry Drama Festival, the Jazz Festival, the Derry Cycling Festival, the Maiden City Festival, the Foyle Film Festival and the biggest Hallowe'en Carnival in Ireland.

Millennium Forum on New Market Street hosts touring productions, including musicals from the West End, dance performances, and classical, rock and pop concerts. ☎ (028) 7126-4455; info@millenniumforum.co.uk; www.millenniumforum.co.uk.

On Artillery Street is **The Playhouse**, home to a number of theater companies. It has a dance studio, art gallery, and presents new plays by local, national and international companies. ☎ (028) 7126-8027; info@derryplayhouse.co.uk.

The Verbal Arts Centre, Bishop Street Within, promotes the written and spoken word through a variety of events. ☎ (028) 7126-6946; info@verbalartscentre.co.uk.

The Nerve Centre at 7-8 Magazine Street is home to film production companies, with editing and recording facilities. There's also a bar, coffee shop, cinema, and two venues that host international acts. ☎ (028) 7126-0562; info@nerve-centre.org.uk; www.nerve-centre.org.uk.

During July and August, the **Walled City Cultural Trail** is the ideal what's-on guide, with themed days, guided tours on foot and by open-top bus, entertainment, details of festivals and places to eat and drink. Check out its Web site and request a brochure, www.derrycity.gov.uk/walledcityculturaltrail, or contact the Derry Visitor & Convention Bureau, ☎ (028) 7126-7284; info@derryvisitor.com.

Check out the entertainment Web site for the northwest, including Derry, at www.gettogether.at.

Adventures

◆ On Foot

Roe Valley Country Park
(Jochen Lueg)

The **Roe Valley Country Park**, one mile south of Limavady off the B192, is popular for canoeing, rock climbing, game fishing and camping. It's also a delightful place to walk. The first domestic hydroelectric power station in the North opened here in 1896 and a lot of the original equipment has been preserved. You also see the ruins of water mills used in linen production. There are riverside walks and a history trail to follow. Visitor Centre is open daily, Easter-Auguist, 10 am-6 pm; September-Easter, Monday-Friday, 10 am-5 pm. The car park is open at all times. ☎ (028) 7772-2074.

Benevenagh, near Limavady
(Jochen Lueg)

Also near Limavady is **Banagher Glen**, with panoramic views as you walk in the county's largest forest. Open to pedestrians all year, and to vehicles daily during July and August and weekends Easter-September. Admission free, phone for times. ☎ (028) 7776-0304.

◆ On Wheels

The **Foyle Valley Cycle Route** takes you along the banks of the river for 21 miles (34 km). It connects Derry City with the border towns of Lifford, Co. Donegal and Strabane, Co. Tyrone. Free map available from Derry Visitor & Convention Bureau, ☎ (028) 7126-7284, www.derryvisitor.com; Strabane Tourist Information Centre, ☎ (028) 7188-3735, www.strabanedc.com; Sustrans, ☎ (028) 9043-4569; Countryside Access and Activities Network, ☎ (028) 9030-3931.

◆ In & On the Water

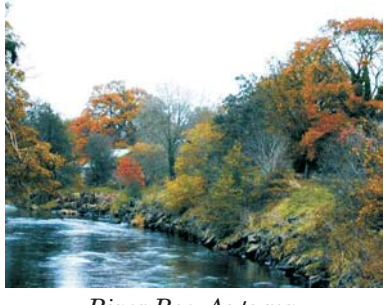
In Derry you can take a trip on the river with **Foyle Cruises**, departing daily at 2 and 4 pm from City Cruise Berth, with a full bar and refreshments on board. Other cruises include evening trips to Greencastle in Co. Donegal. ☎ (028) 7136-2857; fax 7136-2854.

Swimming

Both indoor and outdoor swimming, along with other facilities, is available in Derry and the surrounding area. Always phone to check public access times. Among the options are:

- **City Swimming Baths**, William Street. ☎ (028) 7126-4459
- **Lisnagelvin Leisure Centre**, Richill Park. ☎ (028) 7134-7695

Fishing



River Roe, Autumn
(Jochen Lueg)

The Foyle is known for its salmon and, to a lesser extent, sea trout and brown trout. It has four main tributaries – the Mourne, Derg, Strule and Finn – and has an unusually long season, stretching from March to October. It's one of the richest fishing waters in Europe and one of the best for salmon in the world.

For further information about the Foyle call the **Loughs Agency**, 22 Victoria Road, Derry, open Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm. Fishing permits and licences available there. ☎ (028) 7134-2100, or look at their Web site, www.loughs-agency.org.

In Derry, **Creggan Country Park** is a watersports, outdoor pursuits and angling centre, with taster sessions in a variety of activities. ☎ (028) 7136-3133; info@creggancountrypark.com, www.creggancountrypark.com.

◆ On Horseback

- **Ardmore Stables**, ☎ (028) 7134-5187
- **Faughanvale Pony Trekking Centre** in Greysteel is on a 70-acre working farm, eight miles from Derry and 10 miles (16 km) from Limavady. ☎ (028) 7181-1843.
- **The Island Equestrian Centre**, two miles from Coleraine, set in 160 acres of farmland, ☎ (028) 7034-2599.
- **Timbertop Riding Centre**, 60 Curragh Road, Derry, ☎ (028) 7086-8788

Other riding facilities include the **Banagher Equestrian Centre**, Feeny, Derry, ☎ (028) 7778-1117; and **Streeve Hill House**, Limavady, ☎ (028) 7776-6563.

Leisure Activities

The **Foyle Golf Centre**, less than two miles (3.2 km) north of Derry at 12 Alder Road, has both an 18-hole and nine-hole course, and an indoor floodlit driving range. Open Monday-Friday, 9 am-dark, Saturday and Sunday, 8 am-dark. It also has the **Pitchers Wine Bar and Restaurant**, where there's entertainment on Thursday-Saturday nights. ☎ (028) 7135-2222;mail@foylegolfclub24.co.uk; www.foylegolfcentre.co.uk.

The City of Derry Golf Club, three miles (4.8 km) west of the city on the Strabane Road, has both an 18-hole and nine-hole course with picturesque views over the Foyle. ☎ (028) 7134-6369; cityofderrygolfclub@aol.com; www.cityofderrygolfclub.com.

Brooke Park Leisure Centre, Rosemount Avenue, has two squash courts, tennis courts and a fitness suite. ☎ (028) 7126-2637.

Brunswick Superbowl has 10-pin bowling, restaurant, bar, café, and pool tables. It's open every day from 9 am to late. It's on Brunswick Lane, Pennyburn Industrial Estate. ☎ (028) 7137-1999; fun@brunswicksuperbowl.com; www.brunswicksuperbowl.com.

Where to Stay

For accommodations pricing guide, see page 462.

◆ Hotels

☆☆☆☆ **City Hotel** on Queen's Quay has a marvelous location, close to the Guildhall, walled city and the Foyle. The foyer's décor is bright and welcoming and the staff are helpful and charming.

It belongs to Great Southern Hotels, and offers a choice of standard and executive rooms, suites, and family rooms. It has a leisure center with pool, gym, beauty treatments, and an underground car park. **Thompson's on the River** restaurant overlooks the River Foyle and offers delicious food, not overpriced. Rates from $ per person sharing; off-season or web offers only $$ per room – amazing value. ☎ (028) 7136-5800; res@derry-gsh.com; www.gshotels.com.

☆☆☆☆ **The Tower Hotel** is on Butcher Street is the only hotel inside the walled medieval city. There's a mini-gym and sauna and an underground car park, and it's gay-friendly. The **Bistro** has a Mediterranean menu and a café-style bar with buffet lunch, snacks and bar food all day. Rooms from $$ sharing; special deals available. ☎ (028) 7137-1000; fax 7137-1234; reservations@thd.ie.

City of Derry Travelodge, Strand Road, is within easy walking distance of the walled city. Rooms are comfortable. Like all Travelodges, it's great value for two traveling together, as rates are by room. Breakfast available; cheap parking nearby. $. ☎ (028) 7127-1277; www.travelodge.co.uk.

◆ Rentals and B&B

☆☆☆ **Cathedral Cottage** and ☆☆☆☆ Darcus Cottage, both on London Street inside the walled city, date from the 1760s and have

been tastefully restored. The owners will arrange bike rental, and other activities including hill walking, pony-trekking, tennis, theater and walking tours. They're centrally heated and well equipped, with bed linen and towels supplied. Minimum two-night stay.

Owners also run Bed & Breakfasts at the **Merchant's House**, 16 Queen Street, a Georgian-style townhouse just outside the city walls; and the **Saddler's House**, 36 Great James Street, a tastefully restored mid-19th century townhouse. Rate only $ per person. ☎ (028) 7126-9691; fax 7126-6913; saddlershouse@btinternet.com; www.thesaddlershouse.com.

Useful contact: NISCHA, the Northern Ireland Self-Catering Association, publishes a free guide to member properties, ☎ (028) 9077-6174; info@nischa.com; www.nischa.com; order it or consult it online.

◆ Hostels

Derry City Independent Hostel, 44 Great James Street, ☎ (028) 7137-7989; www.derry-hostel.co.uk

Derry Backpackers, Asylum Road, Derry, ☎ (028) 7137-7989; derryhostel@hotmail.com

Paddy's Palace, Woodleigh Terrace, Derry, Georgian townhouse built in 1830s, ☎ (028) 7130-9051; www.paddyspalace.com

Downhill Hostel, on Downhill beach, between Coleraine and Limavady, ☎ (028) 7084-9077; info@downhillhostel.com www.downhillhostel.com

Dungiven Castle Hostel, in a wonderful castle surrounded by 22 acres of parkland, ☎ (028) 7774-2428; enquiries@dungivencastle.com www.dungivencastle.com

The Flax Mill, Dungiven, in 250 year old converted mill, 3 miles from Dungiven – phone to be picked up. ☎ (028) 7774-2655

Hostel 56, Mageherafelt, near bus station, ☎ (028) 7963-2096

Rick's Causeway Independent Hostel, Portstewart, on seafront, ☎ (028) 7083-3789; rick@thecausewaycoasthostel.fsnet.co.uk

◆ Camping & RV Parks

Phone in advance, particularly if camping, as some parks have very limited spaces for tents.

☆☆☆ **Benone Tourist Complex** on A2 coast road, 12 miles (19 km) north of Limavady. Open all year. ☎ (028) 7775-0555.

☆☆☆ **Golden Sands**, off A2 between Limavady and Coleraine, is close to a beach. ☎ (028) 7775-0324.

☆☆☆☆ **Castlerock Holiday Park**, six miles (10 km) northwest of Coleraine on A2. ☎ (028) 7084-8381.

☆☆☆☆ **Tullans Farm Caravan Park** is on a working farm, a mile (1.6 km) from Coleraine. ☎ (028) 7034-2309; tullansfarm@netscapeonline.co.uk.

☆☆☆ **Juniper Hill Caravan Park** is a mile (1.6 km) east of Portstewart on the A2. ☎ (028) 7083-2023. Also at Portstewart is the ☆☆☆ **Millfield Holiday Village**. ☎ (028) 7083-3308.

Where to Eat

In Derry, **The Sandwich Company** offers a great selection of hot and cold sandwiches, delicious cakes and excellent coffee. Open Monday to Saturday, 8:30am to 5pm. Branches at 61 Strand Road, ☎ (028) 7126-6771; 33 Spencer Road, Waterside, ☎ (028) 7131-3171; and 25 The Diamond, ☎ (028) 7132-7500.

Bright and cheerful **Morelli's/Nino's** on the Promenade in Portstewart looks out over the sea. It has been very popular for years for its range of ice creams, and also serves a choice of hot dishes. Open daily, year-round (except Christmas Day), from 9:30am, until 11:30pm in summer, shorter hours in winter. Note: credit cards not accepted. ☎ (028) 7083-2150.

Rafters, 122 Northland Road, Derry, specializes in chicken, steaks, fish and pizzas. ☎ (028) 7126-6080.

Dittys Coffee Shop, Rainey Street, Magherafelt, between Belfast and Derry. Breakfast and three or four hot dishes are served. Open Monday to Saturday from 8:30 am to 5:30 pm. ☎ (028) 7963-3944.

The Cromore Halt Inn in Portstewart has 12 guest rooms (from $$ per person) and a restaurant that's popular for Sunday lunches. ☎ (028) 7083-6888; fax 7083-1910; info@cromore.com; www.cromore.com.

The Sperrins

The Sperrins region is right in the center of Northern Ireland, stretching from the western shores of Lough Neagh to the border with Donegal, taking in most of **Co. Tyrone** and the southern portion of **County Londonderry**. Its main towns are **Omagh**, **Strabane**, **Cookstown** and Dungannon.

IN THIS CHAPTER

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Criss-crossed by mountains, moorland and inland waters, the Sperrins has been designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. What makes it such a wonderful region to visit is that it is so peaceful. Tyrone is the largest county in the North yet has the smallest population, so its roads are very quiet.

From the 18th to the last century, a huge number of its people left to seek new lives in North America, Canada, Australia and Britain, and there are many places to visit closely associated with some of them, including the family homes of US Presidents. There are also nature trails and forest parks to explore.

The region is steeped in heritage and its hills littered with prehistoric remains. It was here that the Earls of Tyrone and Tyrconnell, O'Neill and O'Donnell, held out against the British in the late 16th century. Some local Irish Catholic landowners managed to hold onto their land after the Flight of the Earls in 1607, but lost it after the 1641 rebellion.

The **Sperrin Mountains** are the main focus of the area; their highest point is Sawel at 2,240 feet (941 m). The region offers a huge choice of activities in unforgettable surroundings. It's a paradise for anyone interested in being outdoors – cycling, walking, angling, golf, watersports – even parachuting.

Getting Here

◆ By Air

The nearest airport is Derry City, and Belfast International Airport is just across Lough Neagh.

◆ By Road

You can reach the region on the following roads: the M1/A29 from Belfast; the A29 from Armagh through Dungannon to Cookstown; the A28/A4/M1/A29 from Dublin; the N14 from Letterkenny through Lifford, Co. Donegal, to Strabane; the A2 from the Inishowen peninsula to Derry and on to Limavady; and the B52/B46/A32 from Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh, to Omagh.

Getting Around

Ulsterbus runs services between its towns and villages. You can explore much of the region on the **Ulsterbus Sperrin Rambler,** which runs between Castledawson and Omagh, passing through Magherafelt, Draperstown, Plumbridge, Gortin. Details ☎ (028) 9066-6630 or www.translink.com.

Ulster American Folk Park

The Sperrins
1. An Creagan Visitor Centre
2. Gortin Glen Forest Park, Ulster History Park
3. Ulster American Folk Park
4. Castlederg Visitor Centre
5. Gray's Printers Museum; Wilson Homestead
6. Sperrin Heritage Centre
7. Dungiven Priory, Cashel Fishery, Banagher Church
8. Flight of the Earls Experience
9. Drum Manor Forest Park, Wellbrook Beetling Mill
10. Springhill House, Model Village
11. Ballyronan Marina
12. The Bridewell
13. The Blacksmith's Forge
Lough Foyle
Limavady
Lough Swilly
Letterkenny
Derry
LONDONDERRY
River Roe
Faughan River
River Foyle
Garvagh
Dungiven
GORTNAMOYAGH FOREST
Kilrea
ANTRIM
Portglenone
Ballymena
Clady
Claudy
DONEGAL
GLENSHANE FOREST
BANAGHER FOREST
Donemana
River Deele
Strabane
Moyola River
Cranagh
Drapertown
Castledawson
Lough Beg
Toome
River Finn
Sion Mills
Glenelly River
Newtown-stewart
Plumbridge
Magherafelt
Owenkillew River
Gortin
DAVAGH FOREST
Lissan Water
ALTAMULLAN FOREST
CASHEL WOOD
Coagh
Castlederg
Ballinderry River
River Derg
Creggan
Cookstown
Fairy Water
Drumquin
Carrickmore
POMEROY FOREST
DRUMCAIRNE FOREST
Lough Derg
LOUGH BRADAN FOREST
Omagh
Lough Neagh
Comowen River
Cloghfin River
Claggan River
TYRONE
DROMORE FOREST
ALTMORE FOREST
Quiggery Water
Dungannon
To Belfast
Dromore
Fintona
L Erne
N
NOT TO SCALE
A2
N13
N14
A5
A6
A29
A26
M2
A42
A54
A31
A505
A32
A35
A47
A45
M1
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Tourist Information

Sperrins Tourism Limited. ☎ (028) 8674-7700; fax 8674-7754; info@SperrinsTourism.com; www.SperrinsTourism.com.

The **Cookstown Tourist Information Centre** is on Burn Road. There is a 24-hour information kiosk outside. The building also houses the **Burnavon Arts and Cultural Centre**. ☎ (028) 8676-6727; tic@cookstown.gov.uk; www.cookstown.gov.uk.

The **Omagh Tourist Information Office** is at 1 Market Street. ☎ (028) 8224-7831; fax 8224-0774; www.discovernorthernireland.com, tourism@omagh.gov.uk. Other offices are at:

- Ballygawley Road, Killymaddy, Dungannon, off A4. ☎ (028) 8776-7259
- Bridewell Centre, Church Street, Magherafelt. ☎ (028) 7963-1510
- The Burnavon, Burn Road, Cookstown. ☎ (028) 8676-6727
- Abercorn Square, Strabane. ☎ (028) 7188-3735 – open in season only

Sightseeing

◆ Omagh

Omagh stands where the rivers Camowen and Drumragh join to become the wide and shallow **Strule**. It's had an interesting history, founded as a monastic settlement in the 8th century; centuries later the O'Neills had a fortress where

the courthouse stands today. Sadly, most people remember its bombing in August 1998, the worst single atrocity of the Troubles, carried out by a breakaway Republican group who don't support the Good Friday Agreement.

Omagh has character and is a busy market town serving its agricultural hinterland. Among its famous sons are songwriter Jimmy Kennedy (*Red Sails in the Sunset; Teddy Bears' Picnic*) and playwright

Brian Friel (*Translations; Dancing at Lughnasa; Philadelphia, Here I Come!*).

The Ulster American Folk Park

Ulster American Folk Park

Three miles (4.8 km) north of Omagh on the A5 is The Ulster American Folk Park. It's an outdoor museum that isn't a bit like one – you feel as if you are in a real place as you wander round. The Park is divided into the Old and New World and you cross between them by ship – a full-scale replica of part of one that carried emigrants to North America during the 18th and 19th centuries.

The park contains reassembled houses and other buildings. Staff in costume and in character tells you about life in these simple surroundings. Among them is the ancestral home of **Thomas Mellon** (born 1813), who left here for Pennsylvania and became a judge, leading banker and millionaire. His son Andrew built Pittsburgh. Another is the boyhood home of **John Joseph Hughes** who became Archbishop of New York and built St. Patrick's Cathedral.

You learn a lot from the displays indoors, including the influence of the Irish, in particular the Ulster-Scots, on life in North America – for instance, the number who signed the ***Declaration of Independence***, and about the American presidents whose families emigrated from this part of the island of Ireland. The park is also home to the Centre for Migration Studies and has an extensive database, useful for researching family history. There is a restaurant, a craft and gift shop, and a currency exchange bureau. Park open daily, April to September; Monday to Friday the rest of the year; ☎ (028) 8224-3292; fax 8224-2241; uafp@iol.ie; www.folkpark.com. Centre for Migration Studies open Monday to Friday year-round; ☎ (028) 8225-6315; fax 8224-2241; uafp@iol.ie; www.qub.ac.uk/cms.

◆ Strabane

Strabane is 20 miles (32 km) north of Omagh on the A5 to Derry, beside the River Mourne and across the River Foyle from Lifford in Co. Donegal. It's another busy market town, which in the 18th century was an important center for printing. On Main Street is an important reminder of that – **Gray's Printing Press**, now a museum run by the National Trust. This was where **John Dunlap** and **James Wilson**, grandfather of US President **Woodrow Wilson**, learned their trade. You get a guided tour, and a visit is particularly worthwhile when there's a compositor at work so, if you can, phone in advance. Open April-September, Tuesday-Saturday. ☎ (028) 7188-0055.

John Dunlap's old home is on Meetinghouse Street, marked with a plaque. He published the *Declaration of Independence* on the front page of his *Pennsylvania Packet*, which was America's first daily newspaper.

The Woodrow Wilson ancestral home is two miles (3.2 km) outside Strabane at Dergalt on the B536 road to Plumbridge. It's a thatched farmhouse, almost unchanged since James Wilson left for America in 1807. Wilsons still live next door and continue to work the farm. Admission free; tours July and August, call ahead. ☎ (028) 7138-2204.

◆ Cookstown

Cookstown, close to Lough Neagh, is the perfect base for exploring the eastern section of the Sperrins. The town's most notable feature is its main street, which must be the longest and widest anywhere – it's 1¼ mile long (two km) and 130 feet (40 m) wide. Take the **Long Hungry Cookstown Town Trail**, details from Tourist Information Centre, ☎ (028) 8676-6727.

◆ Dungannon

Dungannon looks like a typical Planter town, with its planned main street, some attractive Georgian terraces, and a Royal School founded by King James I.

Its police station looks like a castle – and so it should, as it was designed to guard the Khyber Pass and there was a mix-up, so presumably the one meant for here ended up in Southern Afghanistan!

While in Dungannon, visit **The Linen Green**, Moygashel, where you can learn about linen-making in its Visitor Centre. There's a marvelous collection of shops to browse in, including Irish designer outlets, and the **Ulster Weavers Gift Store**, where you'll find pure linen goods and unique gifts. ☎ (028) 8772-4004. You can also eat at the **Loft Restaurant** or **Village Pantry**. The Linen Green has free parking and is open Monday-Saturday, 10 am-5 pm. ☎ (028) 8775-3761; enquiries@thelinengreen.com; www.thelinengreen.com.

Just outside Dungannon is the **Tyrone Crystal factory**, where you can take a guided tour, buy gifts and eat in its restaurant. Open all year, Monday-Saturday, 9 am-6 pm; Sunday, 1-5 pm. ☎ (028) 8772-5335; www.tyronecrystal.com.

Grant Ancestral Home

Near Dungannon, at **Ballygawley**, is the Grant Ancestral Home, where John Simpson, the great-grandfather of Ulysses Simpson Grant, 18th President of the USA, was born in 1738. He emigrated from here in 1760.

Grant, born in 1822 in Ohio, commanded the Union Army during the American Civil War and was twice elected President. His family home has been restored, and has exhibits concerning Grant's life, the Civil War, and the rural life of the time. Open daily, April-September, ☎ (028) 8555-7133.

◆ Sights Worth Seeing

Close to the border with Donegal in the southwest is the **Derg Valley**. At **Castlederg**, on the B72, there's a visitor center on the banks of the river, a good introduction to the area.

Davy Crockett's family came from this remote little village and exhibits include a model of the Alamo where he made his last stand. Open April-October, Tuesday-Friday, 11 am-4 pm; Saturday, 11:30-4; Sunday, 2-5 pm. ☎ (028) 8167-0795.

At Cranagh, nine miles (14.4 km) east of Plumbridge, there's the **Sperrin Heritage Centre**, where you'll find out about the area and can even try panning for gold. It also has a café and shop. Open April-October, 11:30-5:30 pm; Saturday, to 6 pm; Sunday, 2-6 pm. ☎ (028) 8164-8142.

Adventures

◆ On Foot

If you're a walker you have plenty of options here, with everything from town trails to forest walks to hill walking. **An Creagán Visitor Centre** off the A505 at Creggan, between Omagh and Cookstown, is the starting point for a number of walks, ranging from two to nine miles (14.4 km). These explore the archaeological sites in the area. The Centre is open daily, April-September, 11 am-6:30 pm; October-March, it closes at 4:30 pm. There is a charge to see its displays about the area. It also has a licensed restaurant and a shop selling crafts. ☎ (028) 8076 1112; www.an-creagan.com.

Ballyronan Wood on the shore of Lough Neagh, east of Magherafelt on the B160, has a number of circular routes to follow around Traad Ponds. **Cairndaisy Wood** is north of Moneymore off the A29, and **Davagh Forest**, 10 miles (16 km) northwest of Cookstown in the foothills of the Sperrins, is populated by Sika deer. On the B4 between Cookstown and Omagh is the upland village of **Pomeroy** and its forest has a series of nature trails to follow.

Around the picturesque village of **Gortin**, north of Omagh on the River Owenkillew, you have a choice. **The Burn Walk** (two miles/3.2 km) is part of the Ulster Way long-distance route and follows a burn (or stream) through Gortin Gap into the **Gortin Glen Forest Park**. Among other walks is the **Nature Trail** (under two miles/3.2 km), and longest of all is the **Loop Walk** (14 miles/22.5 km).

If you're not exhausted after exploring the Ulster American Folk Park, near Omagh (see page 502), take the circular **Carrigans Walk**. It's 13 miles (21 km) long, crosses the historical McCormack's Bridge, and then follows the old railway line into Omagh.

Walking Festivals

A number of festivals take place annually; ask about them at the tourist office, or see www.sperrinstourism.com.

Something Different

The **Wild Geese Sky Diving Centre** at Garvagh, 12 miles from Colerane, is open all year. It has static-line courses, offers tandem skydiving, and is considered one of the best-equipped centers belonging to the British Parachuting Association. Accommodation and food on-site; parachute@wildgeese.demon.co.uk, www.wildgeese.demon.co.uk; ☎ (028) 2955-8609; fax 2955-7050.

◆ On Wheels

Because its roads are so quiet, the region is ideal for cycling. Here are some suggestions.

From just north of Cookstown, Route 95 of the recently established **Sustrans National Cycling Route** (Sustrans is the UK charity dedicated to sustainable transport), part of the Belfast-to-Ballyshannon route, takes you west. It then follows the Owenkillew River to Gortin.

Another route is the **Loughshore Trail**, fully signposted, which follows the banks of Lough Neagh (it's also Route 94 of the National Cycle Network). Start at Toome on the B160 and go south towards Coagh (pronounced coke) and along the shore.

There's a choice of routes at **Portadown**. Either turn northwards and continue the circuitous route back to Toome, clinging to the eastern bank of the Lough as you pass Antrim town, or travel on southwards to Armagh.

There are free brochures available and you can buy cycling route maps at Tourist Information Centres or online at www.nationalcyclenetwork.org.uk. www.loughshoretrail.com is also worth a look.

Mountain Biking

Opportunities for mountain biking are available at **Gortin Glen Forest Park** outside Omagh, and at **Davagh Forest** near Cookstown, which have tracks designed for both amateurs and the more experi-

enced. For details of routes, bike rental and repair, download the cycling brochure from www.sperrinstourism.com.

- **Cycling the Lough Neagh Region**, www.loughshoretrail.com
- **Sustrans** (from "sustainable transport" and a UK charity) for cycling routes, ☎ (028) 9043-4569; www.sustrans.co.uk.

◆ On Water

Fishing

The Sperrins region is ideal for anyone interested in game or coarse fishing, with so many loughs and river systems to choose from. The **Foyle System** is one of the most prolific salmon and sea trout fisheries not just in Ireland but in all of Europe.

The **Lough Neagh System** is the largest freshwater lake in the UK. The dollaghan, unique to the Lough, is a migratory brown trout caught from mid-July to the end of the season (October 31). The **Lower Bann System** is one of Europe's finest coarse fisheries, particularly the 14-mile stretch from the Eel Weir at Toomebridge, which includes Lough Beg, Newferry and Portglenone. Magherafelt District Council runs a facility at Portglenone, with 89 platform fishing points, open all year and free. ☎ (028) 7939-7979 during office hours.

Each system throughout the Sperrins, as in other areas of Ireland, has what seems like bewildering rules about permits and licenses – best to contact tourist information, permit outlets or tackle shops.

USEFUL CONTACTS

- **Fisheries Conservancy Board**, ☎ (028) 3833-4666
- **Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure**, ☎ (028) 9025-8861
- **The Foyle Fisheries Commission**, ☎ (028) 7134-2100
- **Bann System Limited**, ☎ (028) 7034-4796

TACKLE SHOPS

C.A. Anderson, 64 Market Street, Omagh. ☎ (028) 8224-2311
Smith & Co, 63 Market Street, Omagh. ☎ (028) 8224-2534

Divers, 5 Castle Place, Strabane. ☎ (028) 7188-3021

Derek Hamilton & Co, Cycle & Leisure Sports, Cookstown. ☎ (028) 8676-3682

Bannvalley Gun & Tackle, 18 Main Street, Portglenone. ☎ (028) 2582-1383

David Campbell, Tackle Shop, Newtownstewart. ☎ (028) 8166-1543

Huestons, 55 Main Street, Castledawson. ☎ (028) 7946-8282

N.M. Tackle, 9 Alexandra Place, Sion Mills. ☎ (028) 8165-9501

R.A. Crawfords, Sports Shop, 34 Main Street, Maghera. ☎ (028) 7964-2672

Bert Atkins, 67 Coleraine Road, Garvagh. ☎ (028) 2955-8555

◆ On Horseback

There are a number of equestrian establishments in the Sperrins area.

- The **Clanabogan Riding Stables**, Omagh; ☎ (028) 8225-2050
- **The Ecclesville Equestrian Centre**, Fintona, about seven miles (11.2 km) from Omagh; ☎ (028) 8284-0591; fax 8284-0726.
- **The Ashlee Riding Centre**, Strabane; ☎ (028) 7188-2708
- **Tullywhisker Riding School**, Sion Mills, Strabane; ☎ (028) 8165-8015

Golf

You have a choice of 18-hole courses throughout the Sperrins, among them the following.

- ***Omagh Golf Club**, half a mile south of town. ☎/fax (028) 8224-3160.*
- ***Strabane Golf Club** is a mile (1.6 km) south of the town. ☎ (028) 7138-2271; fax 7138-2007.*
- ***Dungannon GC** is a mile (1.6 km) west of town. ☎ (028) 8772-7338.*

- ***Newtownstewart**, two miles (3.2 km) south-west of the town. ☎ (028) 8166-1466; fax 8166-2506; newtown.stewart@lineone.net.*
- ***Killymoon Golf Club** is south of Cookstown. ☎/fax (028) 8676-3762*

Among the nine-hole courses in the area is **Traad Ponds Golf Club**, on the edge of Lough Neagh, near Magherafelt. ☎ (028) 7941-8865, fax 7941-8511.

Entertainment

◆ Omagh

In Omagh, there's a **leisure center**, which includes a pool and fitness equipment. ☎ (028) 8224-6711. There's also a six-screen **cinema** on the Drumquin road. ☎ (028) 8224-2034. Dún Úladh is the headquarters of ***Comhaltas Ceoltori Eireann*** (an organization that promotes traditional music and dance). It presents sessions of Irish music, song and dance on Saturday nights. ☎ (028) 8224-2777. **McCanns** and **Sally O'Brien's**, both on John Street, Omagh, are just two of the traditional music pubs in the town. Ask at your hotel or at tourist centers about others.

◆ Cookstown

There is a **leisure center** with pool, fitness suite, 10 pin bowling, and squash courts. ☎ (028) 8676-3853. **The Burnavon Arts and Cultural Centre** at the Cookstown Tourist Information Centre hosts a variety of events. ☎ (028) 8676-7727 or www.cookstown.gov.uk.

Where to Stay

For accommodations pricing guide, see page 462.

◆ Hotels

☆☆☆ **The Silverbirch Hotel** on the outskirts of Omagh is family-run and friendly, near shops, pubs, restaurants and other attractions. The hotel is in spacious and mature grounds. **Buttery Bar & Grill**

and separate dining room. Rates $$ per person sharing. ☎ (028) 8224-2520; info@silverbirchhotel.com; www.silverbirchhotel.com.

☆☆ **Tullylagan Manor** is halfway between Dungannon and Cookstown, and is family-run. It's named after the river which flows through its lovely grounds, which cover 30 acres. Rate $$$ ☎ (028) 8676-5100; fax 8676-1715; reservations@tullylagan.fsnet.co.uk, www.tullylagan.co.uk.

☆☆ **Cohannon Inn & Auto Lodge**, Ballynakelly Road, Dungannon, is close to the M1 motorway, yet peaceful. Its 42 rooms each comfortably sleep up to three adults, a child under 12 and a baby in a cot. There's a supermarket, petrol station and post office on-site. The Inn serves food from 7:30am daily. Rate per room only $$, ☎ (028) 8772-4488; fax 8775-2217; enquiries@cohannon-inn.com, www.cohannon-inn.com.

◆ Hostels

Omagh Independent Hostel. ☎ (028) 8224-1973; marella@omaghhostel.co.uk.

Gortin Accommodation Suite, Gortin, south of Strabane near Omagh, is also an activity center. Bunk rooms, family rooms and self-catering houses available, ☎ (028) 8164-8346; visit.gortin@virgin.net, www.gortin.net.

◆ Self-Catering

☆☆☆☆ **Grange Court**, 21-27 Moyle Road, Newtownstewart, Co. Tyrone. Modern complex of 12 apartments, sleeping two to five or three to seven, surrounded by mountains and overlooking the river. Furnished and equipped to a very high standard. On-site Tourist Information Centre, coffee shop. Nightly, weekend, mid-week and weekly rates. Excellent value. ☎ (028) 8166-1877; fax 8166-1956; grangecourt@dial.pipex.com, www.grangecourt.co.uk.

An Clachan Self-Catering Cottages are in the grounds of An Creagán Visitor Centre, on the A505 road between Omagh and Cookstown. There are only eight cottages, with a choice of one, two or three bedrooms, and they're built in the style of traditional homes in the area. Each has a cultighe (pronounced cultytee) in the kitchen – a seat in daytime, a bed by night. They have all the modern facilities, including central heating, TV, phone, and there's a laundry on site. Rates start at £180 for a week in July or August, in a cottage

sleeping two, with weekend and mid-week breaks also available. ☎/fax (028) 8076-1112; info@an-creagan.com; www.an-creagan.com.

◆ Camping & RV Parks

☆ **Clogher Valley Country Caravan Park**, just off the A4 on the way to Fivemiletown. ☎ (028) 8554-8932.

☆☆☆☆ **Drum Manor Forest Park**, on the A505 three miles (4.8 km) west of Cookstown. ☎ (028) 8676-2774.

☆☆☆☆ **Dungannon Park**, a mile (1.6 km) south of town on the A29 to Moy, is in a 70-acre woodland park. ☎ (028) 8772-7327.

☆☆☆☆ **Ballyronan Marina's Caravan & Camping Park**, Magherafelt, is ideal for anyone interested in watersports or walking. ☎ (028) 8676-2205, www.cookstown.gov.uk.

☆☆ **Kilmaddy Tourist Information Centre**, six miles (10 km) west of Dungannon on the A4. ☎ (028) 8776-7259.

☆☆ **Round Lake**, Murley Road, Fivemiletown. ☎ (028) 8952-1949; kilmaddy@nitic.net.

☆☆☆☆ **Gortin Glen**, Lislap, seven miles (11 km) from Omagh, is opposite the Forest Park. ☎ (028) 8164-8108.

Where to Eat

You can enjoy wonderful views over Lough Neagh from **The Quay Wall Restaurant** at the Marine Centre in Ballyronan, while dining on good food. It's fully licensed and serves lunch and dinner. ☎/fax (028) 7941-8099.

The Mellon Country Inn is on the A5 north of Omagh, and just a mile (1.6 km) from the Ulster American Folk Park. It's a great place to stop for a snack or meal, and is a member of the Healthy Eating Circle as well as Taste of Ulster. ☎ (028) 8166-1224; fax 8166-1891.

Whistlers Inn, Main Street, Sixmilecross, seven miles (11 km) south-east of Omagh on the B46, has a great bar menu all week. ☎ (028) 8075-8349.

At Augher, where the A4 and A28 meet, **Rosamund's Coffee Shop** is in what was the Clogher Valley Railway Station before the line closed in 1941. It's open Monday-Saturday, 9 am-5 pm, serving hot and cold snacks and lunch. There's also a shop selling local crafts and Irish linen. ☎ (028) 8554-8601.

Kingdoms of Down

1. Castle Ward
2. Grey Abbey
3. Mount Stewart
4. Scrabo Country Park
5. Crawfordsburn Country Park
6. Colin Glen Forest Park
7. The Ballance House
8. Hillsborough Village
9. Rowallene Garden
10. Castlewellan Forest Park
11. Tollymore Forest Park
12. Delamont Country Park
13. Slieve Gullion
14. St. Patrick's Country
15. Ulster Folk & Transport Museum
16. Ballycopeland Windmill
17. Giants Ring
18. Round Tower

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The Kingdoms of Down

County Down is surrounded on three sides by water, with more than 200 miles (320 km) of coastline, and is also the home of the **Mountains of Mourne**, made famous in song.

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- South of Bangor 518
- South of Newry. 520
- Mountains of Mourne 520
- Kilkeel & Newcastle 521
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On its east coast is the **Ards Peninsula**, a long, thin stretch of land, shaped like a hook, which almost encloses Strangford Lough, with just a narrow channel near Portaferry open to the Irish Sea. There are long stretches of sandy beaches and lovely views as you travel around this part of the county. The area south of here, between Strangford Lough and Dundrum Bay, is known as the Lecale region, and has many associations with Ireland's patron saint, so is often called St. Patrick's Country. He landed for the first time in Ireland on the shore of Strangford Lough in 442 AD and is believed to be buried at Downpatrick. Still farther south is the fjord of Carlingford Lough, facing County Louth in the Republic.

County Down is a great destination for anyone interested in outdoor activities, such as walking, golfing, riding, or watersports. The region is dotted with prehistoric monuments, including **standing stones**, **cairns**, and **dolmens** dating from around 3000 BC. There are also fascinating stately homes and

Dundrum Bay

their wonderful gardens, forest parks and other beautiful sights to enjoy.

Among the county's main towns are **Downpatrick**, **Newry** which was given city status in 2002, and **Bangor**, which is the largest.

Getting Here

◆ By Air

Belfast City Airport is just off the A2 on the road to Bangor.

◆ By Road

Bangor is 13 miles (21 km) from Belfast on the A2; Dublin is 118 miles (189 km) via the A2-M1-A1-M1-N1-M1, and Bangor is also connected to Belfast by rail and bus.

Newry is served by major roads A27 north to Portadown, and then A3 east to Lurgan and the M1 to Belfast; the A25 west to Co. Monaghan and east to Castlewellan and Downpatrick; the A2 south to Warrenpoint and then around the coast all the way to Belfast; and the A1 north to the M1 to Belfast or south toward Dublin.

Tourist Information

Tower House, Quay Street, Bangor, ☎ (028) 9127-0069

Gateway Tourist Information Centre, Newry Road, Banbridge, ☎ (028) 4062-3322

The St. Patrick Centre, Market Street, Downpatrick, ☎ (028) 4461-2233

The Courthouse, The Square, Hillsborough, ☎ (028) 9268-9717

Bridge Street, Kilkeel, ☎ (028) 4176-2525

Newcastle Centre, Central Promenade, ☎ (028) 4372-2222

Armagh Down Tourism Partnership, 40 West Street, Newtownards, Co. Down, ☎ (028) 9182-2881; fax 9182-2202; info@armaghanddown.com, www.armaghdown.com, www.kingdomsofdown.com; **Regent Street**, Newtownards, ☎ (028) 9182-6846.

Ards Peninsula-Newtownards Tourist Information Centre, ☎ (028) 9128-6846; fax 9182-6681; tourism@ards-council.gov.uk; www.ards-council.gov.uk

Newry & Mourne District Council, ☎ (028) 3031-3031; fax 3031-3077; and **Cranfield Beach**, off A2 Rostrevor-Kilkeel road, open in season only, ☎ (028) 4176-2525; info@newryandmourne.gov.uk; www.newryandmourne.gov.uk

The Stables, Castle Street, Portaferry, open in season only. ☎ (028) 4272-9882

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

If your family roots are in Co. Down or Co. Antrim, contact the **Ulster Historical Foundation** in Belfast (page 454).

Sightseeing

◆ Bangor

Bangor is on the northern coast of the Ards Peninsula, at the mouth of Helen's Bay on Belfast Lough. It's been a popular seaside resort for many years and more recently has become a commuter town, as it's linked so well to Belfast by road, rail and bus.

Bangor Castle
(North Down Borough Council)

Most of the town's buildings date from the time when Queen Victoria was on the British throne, including **Bangor Castle**, now the Town Hall, which houses the **North Down Heritage Centre**. Open daily except Mondays, 10:30am to 4:30pm; Sundays 2-4:30pm; also open Bank Holiday Mondays, and until 5:30pm in July & August. Admission free, donations welcome. ☎ (028) 9127-1200.

There are a number of public parks in Bangor, the most interesting being **Ward Park**, which has two large ponds with wildfowl, including a resident flock of barnacle geese.

The Ulster Folk & Transport Museum

This museum has been developed over the last 40 years or so. It is on the lovely estate of **Cultra Manor**, on the A2 near Holywood, between Belfast and Bangor. Some trains stop here, and it's also on a bus route.

As at the Ulster American Folk Park near Omagh, Co. Tyrone, and the Bunratty Folk Park in Co. Clare in the Republic, buildings have been transported stone by stone from other areas and recreated here.

In the Folk Section there's a variety of buildings, demonstrations of traditional farming, a museum and photographic archive. The Transport Section has the most comprehensive collection of vehicles in Ireland and historical displays; www.uftm.org.uk.

There's a tea room in Cultra Manor, open year-round from 10 am, Monday-Saturday, 11 am on Sundays. Closes at 6 pm daily from July to September, and on weekends from March to June; closes earlier rest of year. You can buy a combined ticket, or pay separately for Folk and Transport. ☎ (028) 9042-8428; fax 9042-8728, www.uftm.org.uk.

◆ Along the Coast

Cockle Row Cottages,
(North Down Borough Council)

Continue on the A2 along the coast from Bangor, and you come to interesting villages. At Groomsport, three miles (4.8 km) from Bangor, there's a harbor with a sandy beach on both sides. **Cockle Row Cottages**, two 18th-century fishermen's cottages, one with a thatched roof, are open in summer for craft demonstrations. Boat trips to the three **Copeland Islands** run from here in summer. The islands also pro-

vide opportunities for scuba diving, wildlife viewing, wilderness camping, swimming and fishing.

The town of **Donaghdee** has a large harbor and a lighthouse, and for centuries offered refuge to ships from the dangers of the reefs along the coast. It's also the nearest port in Ireland to Britain – it's only 21 miles (34 km) across to Portpatrick.

You see edible seaweed, called dulse, being gathered here at low tide. It is dried and sold in little bags – it's not to everyone's taste but is worth trying and it's believed to be very good for you.

There used to be over 100 windmills in Co. Down, and you can see remnants of them – just the stumps. At **Ballycopeland**, one mile (1.6 km) west of Millisle, you have the chance to see a working windmill that was built about 1790 and was still in use until 1915. In the miller's house there's a model and you can follow the process of turning corn into flour. Admission free. ☎ (028) 9054-6552. You can download an information leaflet from www.ehsni.gov.uk.

Windmill, Ballycopeland, (Ireland for Visitor)s

Millisle is a seaside resort; **Ballywalter** has a busy harbor; and just south of it is **Long Strand**, a wide and safe beach with good facilities for watersports.

At **Portavogie** there's a modern harbor, boat-building yards and a lively fish auction on the quay most evenings, as one of the North's main fishing fleets is based here.

Kearney, just off the A2, on the tip of the peninsula, is owned by the National Trust. It's a dear little fishing village on a low rocky coast. Some of its traditional houses have been restored, and it is worth the detour. Walk along the coast southwards to the lovely sandy beach at **Knockinelder**. You'll probably see seals basking on the rocks.

◆ Strangford Lough

Castle Ward, Portaferry

Portaferry is on the eastern entrance to Strangford Lough and is very attractive, with a long and low waterfront. Until the famines of the 1840s, it was a thriving industrial town, and nowadays it's a center for yachting and for sea angling, both in the Lough and sea.

Castle Ward, nearby, is a curiosity, as it was built in two distinctive architectural styles in the 18th century. The entrance façade is in the Classical style, while the garden side is Gothic and looks down on the Lough. It's surrounded by a beautiful 750-acre (300-hectare) walled estate, with paths through the woodland.

There's a converted barn in its courtyard, which is a venue for opera and concerts. It has a tea room and a large shop selling National Trust items which are always great value, often unusual and make lovely gifts – plus you can feel good, knowing you're helping a great cause!

Grounds open daily, year-round. House and wildlife center open March to end of October. You can get a combined ticket or pay separately for grounds only; call for details. ☎ (028) 4488-1204; fax 4488-1729; castleward@ntrust.org.uk.

◆ South of Bangor

South of Bangor on the A21 is the busy manufacturing town of **Newtownards**. Just before you come to it is the **Somme Heritage Centre**. It recalls the part played by the 10th and Ulster Divisions in the ghastly battle in 1916 during World War I. There are reconstructed frontline trenches, which capture some of the horror. Open July and August, Monday to Friday, 10 am to 5 pm; Saturday-Sunday from noon. The rest of the year call ahead for opening hours; ☎ (028) 9182-3202.

Castle Espie is on Strangford Lough, three miles south of Comber and 13 miles southeast of Belfast. It's signposted from the A22 Comber-Killyleagh-Downpatrick road. Run by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, it has the largest collection of swans, ducks and geese in Ireland, with hides, gardens and woodland walks for bird-watching. Open year-round. July and August, Monday to Saturday, 10:30 am to 5:30 pm; Sunday from 11:30. Off-season hours vary; call ahead. ☎ (028) 9187-4146; www.wwt.org.uk, castleespie@wwt.org.uk.

◆ Downpatrick

The town is charming. It is set on two low hills, and has lots of late Georgian and early Victorian buildings. It was the main county town in medieval times.

The present **Cathedral** was built in 1826 and incorporates parts of a 12th-century building. Although no one knows for certain if St. Patrick was really buried here (Armagh also claims his final resting-place), the country's patron saint is commemorated by a granite boulder in the churchyard marked with his name and by a huge statue on the top of Slieve Patrick, the hill across the valley. There are great celebrations here on March 17, St. Patrick's Day.

Ego Patricius – The Saint Patrick Centre is next to the Cathedral and the Down County Museum, and tells the story of the saint and his legacy, using interactive techniques. It also houses temporary exhibitions and the town's **Tourist Information Centre**. Open daily year-round. ☎ (028) 4461-9000; fax 4461-9111.

The Down County Museum is in the former 18th-century jail and among its exhibits are restored cells with life-size figures. It has temporary exhibitions, a teashop and gift shop. Admission free. Open Monday-Friday, 10 am-5 pm; Saturday-Sunday from 1 pm. ☎ (028) 4461-5218.

◆ Newry

Newry is named after a yew tree, said to have been planted by St. Patrick. It straddles the River Bann and the border with the neighboring county, so its Town Hall is actually half in Co. Down and half in Co. Armagh.

In 1578 the first Protestant church in Ireland was built on top of the steep hill close to the Town Hall. In the 18th century, a canal was built between Lough Neagh and Newry, the first inland canal in Ireland.

Don't miss River Street, where there's a row of tiny houses with eagles over their doors; and No. 1 Trevor Hill, the oldest in a row of fine Georgian houses.

◆ South of Newry

Narrow Water Castle

Head out of Newry on the A2, southwards toward Warrenpoint, and after four miles (6.4 km) you come to **Narrow Water Castle**, standing on a rock jutting out into the estuary. It was built in 1560 to defend the Clanrye River, which flows into Carlingford Lough, a mile (1.6 km) farther south.

AN AMERICAN CONNECTION

On your way into Rostrevor, still on the A2, you pass an obelisk in memory of Major General Robert Ross (1766-1814), who captured Washington DC in 1814 after defeating the Americans at Bladensburg during the War of 1812. He burned the White House after eating in President Madison's dining room – and was killed soon afterwards in a skirmish at Baltimore.

Warrenpoint and **Rostrevor**, three miles (4.8 km) apart, are small resorts looking out over the Lough. Rostrevor has a long seafront and a mild climate, so palm trees and mimosa flourish here. It has an air of gentility, with oak trees in its square and some fine old houses.

◆ The Mountains of Mourne

This is a compact range of mountains, 15 miles long (24 km) and eight miles (15 km) wide, with only about 12 of the 60 or more individual summits rising above 2,000 feet (610 m). Slieve Donard at 2,796 feet (852 m) is the highest peak in the North. Whether approached from Newry on the

A25 or B8, from Belfast on the A50 via Banbridge, or from the direction of the Ards Peninsula, they are equally beautiful.

Cranfield Beach is in an absolutely beautiful setting at the mouth of Carlingford Lough, with the Mountains of Mourne forming the perfect backdrop. It's off the main A2 Rostrevor-Kilkeel road, and worth the detour.

◆ Kilkeel

Kilkeel is a busy country town, home to the largest fishing fleet in the North, with landings and auctions on the quay that are fascinating to watch. Around the port are fish-processing factories, and the piers are popular with anglers. The town has attractive winding streets with interesting terraces of shops and houses.

On the A2 north of Kilkeel is **Annalong**, a pretty fishing village with a marine park and harbor, set against the lovely backdrop of Slieve Binnian and its craggy slopes. Unfortunately, on the outskirts of the village are rather uninteresting modern houses.

Overlooking the harbor is the **Annalong Corn Mill**, built around 1830 and powered by a waterwheel. There's a Visitor Centre and behind it a pleasant herb garden. Guided tours April-October, daily except Tuesdays, 2-6 pm. ☎ (028) 4376-8736.

◆ Newcastle

Newcastle is one of the North's most popular resorts, with a long sandy beach on the edge of Dundrum Bay. This is the place songwriter Percy French, famous in Ireland, celebrated in *Where the Mountains of Mourne Sweep Down to the Sea*, and there's a memorial fountain to him in the gardens on the promenade.

Adventures

◆ On Foot

The area around Strangford Lough is perfect for walking and for cycling. The Lough is a bird sanctuary and is dotted with drowned drumlins (low ridges), which are great breeding grounds for wildlife, including seals. Head to the **Strangford Lough Wildlife Information Centre** before exploring the area on foot; it's on the shore at Castle Ward, a National Trust

property. Walks, including those at low-tide over to South, Horse and Ballyhenny islands, are organized from there, plus guided boat trips. ☎ (028) 4488-1204, castleward@nationaltrust.org.uk, for details.

The Centre is open daily from June through August, shorter hours in off-season; closed from the end of October to mid-March.

In the Steps of Saint Patrick

WAYMARKED WAYS

The waymarked **Lecale Way** follows in the steps of St. Patrick, but don't worry – you don't have to be religious to enjoy it. Highlights include wonderful views of Strangford Lough, the Mourne Mountains, the pretty village of Strangford and Murlough Bay National Nature Reserve.

The route is 40 miles (64 km) long and, of course, can be undertaken in stages.

It starts on the shore of the lough near Raholp, where the saint is believed to have landed, and then follows the coastline to Newcastle inside the Lecale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, where it ends.

There's an illustrated guide available at tourist offices – try first at the St. Patrick Centre, Market Street, Downpatrick, ☎ (028) 4461-2233, or Newcastle Centre, Central Promenade, ☎ (028) 4372-2222). Or take a look at www.countrysiderecreation.com.

LOCAL TRAILS

There's a self-guided trail in Newry, and a guided historical tour of nearby Bessbrook. For details, ☎ (028) 3026-8877.

There are also self-guided trails around Castlewellan, Kilkeel, Dundrum, Newcastle and Rostrevor. For details, contact tourist information or call the Mournes Heritage Trust. ☎ (028) 4372-4059, www.mournelive.com.

THE MOUNTAINS OF MOURNE

The Mountains of Mourne provide numerous opportunities for walkers and climbers. Following are suggested routes.

North of Kilkeel, on the A2, is the **Blue Lough Walk**, five miles (eight km), a lovely introduction to the Mountains of Mourne. It starts in the car park at Carrick Little and crosses the Mourne Wall, where it de-

scends from Slieve Binnian and then follows old quarry tracks across open heath beside Annalong Wood.

Among other walks is a 12-mile (19-km) circular route from the Donard car park on the A2 at Newcastle, farther along the coast from Kilkeel.

The **Mourne Mountain Walk** follows the Glen River through woodland, crosses the Mourne Wall under Slieve Donard, and then joins the Brandy Pad, an old smugglers' trail. Passing under The Castles (rock towers) close to the 400-foot-high (120-m) Diamond Rocks, it then follows the Trassey River. Next the route joins a short section of the Ulster Way, and then leaves it to follow the Shimna River, passing through Tollymore Forest, before returning to the car park.

Mountains of Mourne

The National Trust maintains coastal and mountain paths to **Slieve Donard** and neighboring **Slieve Commedagh**. Park in Newcastle or at Bloody Bridge on the A2, two miles (3.2 km) south of Slieve Donard.

From Bloody Bridge, you can follow the **Brandy Pad** to Slieve Donard or enjoy the **Mourne Coastal Path**. Details from the National Trust's South Down office at ☎/fax (028) 4375-1467.

PARKS, RESERVES & GARDENS

A mile (1.6 km) south of Dundrum is **The Murlough National Nature Reserve**, with its network of self-guided paths and boardwalks through dunes, woodland and heath. It's looked after by the National Trust, and is accessible all year, with an admission charge from May through the middle of September, when facilities are open. ☎/fax (028) 4375-1467; umnnrw@ntrust.org.uk.

Castlewellan Forest Park is at the junction of the A50 and A25, northwest of Newcastle. Among its features is the national arboretum, started in 1740, a hedge maze and a three-mile (4.8-km) trail around the lake with sculptures made from natural materials. There's

a Visitor Centre and café. Open daily, 10 am-dusk. ☎ (028) 4377-8664; customer.forestservice@dardni.gov.uk; www.forestserviceni.gov.uk.

Tollymore Forest Park is in the foothills of the Mournes on the B180 west of Newcastle. Among the follies is a barn that looks like a Gothic church. It houses the Information Centre and café. Take a walk along the Shimna River and you pass curiosities, natural and man-made, including bridges, grottos and caves. It's also a good starting point for exploring the Mournes, with marked paths to follow. Open daily, 9 am-dusk. ☎ (028) 4372-2428; e-mail and Web site same as Castlewellan, above.

The **Silent Valley** and **Ben Crom reservoirs** supply 30 million gallons of water a day to Belfast and Co. Down, and around them is the **Mourne Wall**, which took over 18 years to complete between 1904 and 1922. It is 22 miles long and connects the summits of no fewer than 15 mountains, including Slieve Donard.

To get to Silent Valley, take the B27 from Kilkeel, turning right after four miles (6.4 km). There's an Information Centre, craft shop and café, open daily April-September, 10:30 am-6:30 pm; phone for hours other times of year. ☎ (028) 9074-1166.

Rowallane Garden, another National Trust property, is a mile south of Saintfield and 11 miles southeast of Belfast just west of the A7 to Downpatrick. Planting and collecting started in the 1860s and continues today, and there's a huge variety of trees, shrubs, and plants from all over the world. At every time of the year it is enchanting. Open daily; May-September, 10 am-8 pm; to 4 pm the rest of the year. ☎ (028) 9751-0131, fax 9751-1242; rowallane@nationaltrust.org.uk.

WALKING FESTIVALS

The **Down District Walking Festival**, early August, ☎ (028) 4176-9965, fax 4461-0801, www.armaghanddown.com; and the **Wee Binnian Walking Festival** Newry, mid-September, ☎ (028) 3026-7556.

◆ On Water

Boating

The marina at Bangor is the largest in Ireland, and there are four yacht clubs. Boating and sea angling are very popular.

The **MV *Salutay***, based in Bangor, is available for charter for wreck, scenic and drift diving. ☎ (028) 9181-2081; fax 9182-0635; salutay@btopenworld.com; www.salutay.com.

A useful source of information for divers is the Web site www.planadive.co.uk.

You can cross to Strangford on the other shore of the lough by car ferry from Portaferry; the trip only takes about five minutes, but grab the chance to see the views of the lough and of Portaferry from it.

Boats are available to rent for sea fishing at Portaferry from **Des Rogers**, ☎ (028) 4272-8297, or **John Murray**, ☎ (028) 4272-8414.

Fishing

The South East fishery region stretches from **Belfast Lough** to **Carlingford Lough** and westwards to Craigavon and Armagh in the neighboring county.

Near Newcastle you can fish **Castlewellan Lake**; other lakes include **McCourts**, **Writes Lough**, **Ballykeel**, **Cowey**, **Money** and **Loughbrickland**.

There are also the rivers descending from the Mournes to the sea, including **Moneycarragh**, **Shimna** and **Whitewater**.

Take a look at the Web site www.fjordlands.org, which has lots of advice about angling and coarse fishing in the Strangford Lough area.

Coarse fishing is popular, with roach, bream, perch, rudd, eels and pike, caught at various locations, from the busy town of Newry to the sea locks on the Omeath road.

Near Downpatrick is the **Quoile Basin** and its mixed coarse and wild brown trout fishery. Rudd, perch, eels and pike are also available in the National Nature Reserve. Also nearby is the mixed coarse and

game fishery of Lough Money. Banbridge is a good center for fishing the lakes.

Remember to check with local tackle shops, or with tourist information centers, about licenses and permits.

◆ On Horseback

The **Ardminnan Equestrian Centre** is 1½ miles (2.4 km) from Cloughy near Portaferry on the Ards Peninsula. ☎/fax (028) 4277-1321; info@ardminnan.com.

The **Newcastle Riding Centre** is two miles (3.2 km) from the village, near the beach and forest tracks. ☎ (028) 4372-2694.

The **Mourne Trail Riding Centre**, two miles (3.2 km) from Newcastle, caters to experienced riders. ☎/fax (028) 4372-4351; mgtnewsam@aol.com; www.mournetrailridingcentre.com.

Other riding facilities include:

- **Ballynahinch Riding School**. ☎ (028) 9756-2883.
- **Cherry Tree Riding Centre**, Newtownards. ☎ (028) 4272-9639.
- **Gransha Equestrian Centre**, Bangor. ☎ (028) 9181-3313.
- **Oakwood Riding Establishment**, Mayobridge, Newry. ☎ (028) 3085-1484.
- **Tullymurray Equestrian Centre**, Aghadowey. ☎ (028) 4481-1880.
- **The Mount Pleasant Riding and Trekking Centre** is a mile (1.6 km) from Castlewellan. ☎ (028) 4377-8651; fax 4377-0030; www.mountpleasantcentre.com.

◆ In Golf

There is a great choice of golf courses in the county. Always check in advance if clubs are available for rent, and at which times visitors are welcome. The following is a partial listing of local courses.

The most famous is the **Royal County Down Golf Club** at Newcastle, first laid out in 1889. ☎ (028) 4372-3314; fax 4372-6281; golf@royalcountydown.org.

The seaside course of **Ardglass Golf Club** is in the town. ☎ (028) 4484-1219; fax 4484-1841; www.ardglassgolfclub.com.

Bangor Golf Club has an undulating parkland course. ☎ (028) 9127-0922. A mile (1.6 km) west of Bangor is the seaside meadowland course of the **Carnalea Club**. ☎ (028) 9127-0368; fax 9127-3989.

South of Bangor on the way to Newtownards, the **Clandeboye Club** has two courses. ☎ (028) 9127-1767; fax 9147-3711.

The Downpatrick Golf Club is a mile (1.6 km) from the town. ☎ (028) 4461-5947; fax 4461-7502; info@downpatrickgolfclub.com; www.downpatrickgolfclub.com.

The Bright Castle Golf Club is four miles (6.4 km) south of Downpatrick. ☎ (028) 4484-1319.

The Scrabo Golf Club is a mile (1.6 km) southwest of Newtownards. ☎ (028) 9181-2355; fax 9182-2919.

The Warrenpoint Club is close to Carlingford Lough, a mile (1.6 km) from the town. ☎ (028) 4175-3695; fax 4175-2918; warrenpointgolfclub@bttalk21.com.

The Banbridge Golf Club is just over a mile (1.6 km) northwest of the town. ☎ (028) 4066-2211; fax 4066-9400; info@banbridge-golf.freeserve.co.uk.

Where to Stay

◆ Hotels

ACCOMMODATIONS

$ . . . . . under $60
$$. $61-120
$$$. $121-182
$$$$. $183-243
$$$$$. . . . . over $244

☆☆☆ **The Old Inn**, Main Street, Crawfordsburn, is one of the oldest hostelries in Ireland, dating back to 1614. It's only six miles (10 km) to Belfast City Airport and is on the way to Bangor. Guests have included writer C. S. Lewis (author of the *Narnia* books); former US President George Bush, Senior; and Peter the Great, Tsar of Russia. It's partly thatched, and all 31 bedrooms are tastefully furnished with antiques. There's also a romantic cottage in the grounds. Dining options include the **Parlour Bar,** open from noon

to 7pm; the **Churn Bistro**; and for fine dining its award-winning **Restaurant 1614**. Rates from $$ with special breaks and weekend offers available. ☎ (028) 9185-3255; info@theoldinn.com; www.theoldinn.com.

☆☆☆ **Kilmorey Arms Hotel**, center of Kilkeel, is family-run and has 25 comfortable bedrooms. **Johnny Bells Fish & Steak Restaurant** stays open late on Friday and Saturday nights and serves carvery lunch on Sundays. Food is also available in its **Bar 43**, where there's live music most Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights. Rates $$, with special deals also available. ☎ (028) 4176-2220; fax 4176-5399; e-mail: info@kilmoreyarmshotel.co.uk www.kilmoreyarmshotel.co.uk.

☆☆☆ **Strangford Arms Hotel**, Newtownards. This family-run hotel has 38 bedrooms, and food is available in its **Bisto** and **Restaurant**. It also has a popular nightclub. Rate $. ☎ (028) 9181-4141; fax 9181-1010; info@strangfordhotel.co.uk www.strangfordhotel.co.uk.

☆☆☆ **The Narrows** is a licensed guesthouse in Portaferry. Its waterfront setting is part of what makes it so special; it also has a walled garden and a sauna, so is very relaxing. There are just 13 bedrooms, all with great views of Strangford Lough, and its restaurant is open to non-residents. Rates from $. ☎ (028) 4272-8148; fax 4272-8105; reservations@narrows.co.uk; www.narrows.co.uk.

◆ Rental Cottages

The National Trust has cottages for rent – one at **Castle Ward**, and two near the **Murlough Nature Reserve**; all sleep from two to four (plus an infant); The National Trust Holiday Cottages, Holiday Booking Office, PO Box 536, Melksham, Wiltshire, SN12 8SX, UK; ☎ (0044) 870-458-4422 (or 870-458-4411 for a brochure); fax (0044) 870-458-4400; e-mail cottages@nationaltrust.org.uk; www.nationaltrustcottages.org.uk.

The **Mountains of Mourne Country Cottages** are two miles from the fishing port of Kilkeel. They are made up of seven cottages in the restored clachan, or medieval-style settlement of Hanna's Close, and three others nearby. Hanna's Close has been continuously occupied since 1640! Despite their history, they have all the modern comforts we expect. There's a cottage museum and meeting place on-site. ☎/fax (028) 4176-5999; mourne.cottages@dnet.co.uk, www.travel-ireland.com/hannas.

A fascinating site, with lots of background on the area is www.strangfordlough.org.

◆ Hostels

All the hostels listed are approved by the tourist board.

The Greenhill YMCA Outdoor Centre, Donard Park, Newcastle. Booking essential; ☎ (028) 4372-3172.

Newcastle Youth Hostel is in a townhouse on the seafront, and meals are available if booked in advance. ☎/fax (028) 4372-2133; www.hini.org.uk.

Ballinran Mourne Centre Hostel, in an area of outstanding natural beauty, three miles from Kilkeel and 12 miles from Newcastle. ☎/fax (028) 4176-5727.

The Barholm Hostel, Portaferry, overlooks Strangford Lough. ☎ (028) 4272-9598; fax 4272-9784; barholm.portaferry@virgin.net; www.barholmportaferry.co.uk.

Cnocnafeola Cultural & Activity Centre, Attical, Kilkeel, cook for yourself or eat in restaurant, ☎ (028) 4176-5859; info@cnocnafeolacentre.com www.cnocnafeolacentre.com

Cornmill Quay Hostel, Marina Park, Annalong, also has lovely cottages for rent, ☎ (028) 4376-8269; info@cornmillquay.com www.cornmillquay.com

◆ Camping & RV Parks

Remember to phone in advance, as arrangements vary, and some sites geared to RVs may not welcome tent campers, or have very few spaces for them.

☆☆☆☆☆ If you stay at the **Annalong Caravan Park**, in the center of the village, on the seafront, you have a private beach to enjoy. The park is on the Millisle-to-Ballywalter road, open mid-March to mid-November. ☎ (028) 4376-8248; info@chestnuttcaravans.co.uk; www.chestnuttcaravans.co.uk.

☆☆☆☆☆ **Cranfield Caravan Park**, south of Kilkeel, by the sea. ☎/fax (028) 4176-2572.

☆☆☆☆☆ **The Camping and Caravanning Club** is in the Down District Council Country Park, a mile (1.6 km) south of Killyleagh on

the A22, on the shores of Strangford Lough. ☎ (028) 4482-1833; www.campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk.

☆☆☆ **Sandilands Caravan Park** is three miles (4.8 km) south of Kilkeel. ☎ (028) 4176-3634; www.chestnuttcaravans.co.uk.

Also near Kilkeel is the ☆☆☆☆ **Chestnutt Caravan Park**, ☎ (028) 4176-2653.

Close to Rostrevor is the **Kilbroney Park**, overlooking Carlingford Lough. ☎ (028) 4173-8134.

☆☆☆ **Tollymore Forest Park** has 2,000 acres (800 hectares) of woodland at the foot of the Mournes. There's a choice of activities available, including pony trekking, hill climbing and game fishing (permit needed). The site is on the B180, three miles (4.8 km) from Newcastle; open all year. ☎ (028) 4372-2428; www.forestserviceni.gov.uk.

At ☆☆☆ **Castlewellan Forest Park** there's much to see and do, including trout fishing (permit required), an orienteering course, a sculpture trail, or exploring the 18th-century farmstead, and it's open year-round. There's a Visitor Centre with café. ☎ (028) 4377-8664; www.forestserviceni.gov.uk.

At Newcastle there's the ☆☆ **Windsor Caravan Park**. ☎ (028) 4372-3367.

☆☆☆ **Exploris Touring Caravan Park** is at Portaferry. ☎ (028) 4272-8610.

At Hillsborough there's the ☆☆☆ **Lakeside-View Park**, ☎ (028) 9268-2098; www.lakeside-view.8m.com.

On the A1 Belfast-Newry road, the ☆☆☆ **Banbridge Gateway Tourist Information Centre** has a caravan and camping site, which is open all year. ☎ (028) 4062-3322; www.banbridge.com.

Where to Eat

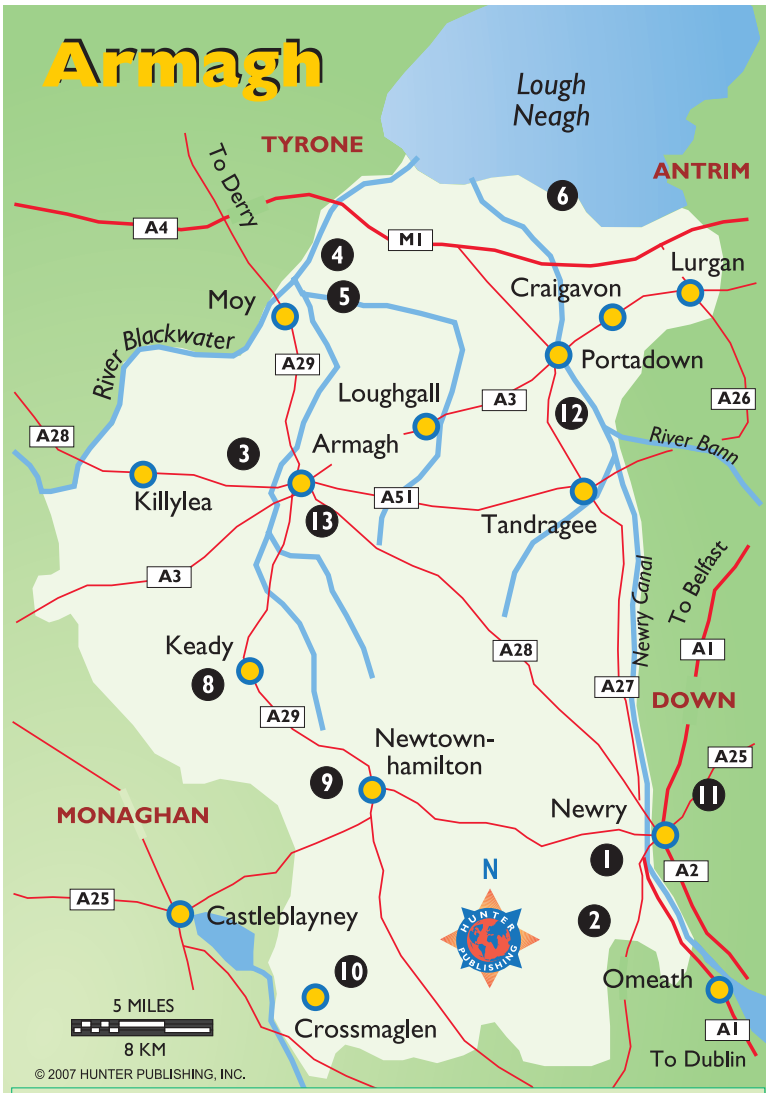
The Lobster Pot, The Square, Strangford, renowned for seafood, and offers bar food all day. ☎/fax (028) 4488-1288.

The Jolly Judge on Regent Street, Newtownards, serves a wide range of bar food every day of the week. ☎ (028) 9181-9895.

Knotts Cake and Coffee Shop on High Street, Newtownards, is a great place to stop for a snack or meal during the day, Monday to Saturday. In addition to a range of delicious cakes and breads, it serves pies, casseroles and stews. It's located in a large and airy Victorian building and is smoke-free. ☎ (028) 9181-9098.

An unusual place to stop is the **Cairnmore Antiques Tea Shop**, Lambeg Road in Lisburn, where you can enjoy a snack and browse among the antiques on sale. Open 2-5 pm from Monday to Friday and on Saturdays from 11 am to 5 pm, it serves tea, scones and pastries. ☎ (028) 9267-3115.

The Wildflower Inn, Main Street, Greyabbey, is a former coaching inn with a cozy atmosphere and a log fire. It caters to all tastes, its menu including salads, fish and roast beef. ☎ (028) 4278-8260.



1. Killevy Churches
2. Slieve Gullion
3. Fort Navan (Emain Macha)
4. The Argory
5. Ardress House; Charlemont Fort
6. Oxford Island
7. Belfast International Airport
8. Keady Heritage Centre
9. Tí Chulainn Centre
10. Creggan Graveyard
11. Derrymore Cottage
12. Brackagh Moss Nature Reserve
13. Palace Demesne; Franciscan Friary Ruins; St. Patrick's Cathedral; Armagh Observatory & Planetarium; Cardinal O'Fiaich Memorial Library & Archive

County Armagh

Armagh is the smallest county in the North, yet within its 484 square miles (1,258 square km) there is a great variety of scenery. In the southeast are mountains and rocky glens, including the Ring of Gullion, to the south is a rolling terrain dotted with drumlins (low hills formed by glaciers), while its central area is wild and open moorland.

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As you travel around the countryside, look for games of road bowling, also known as "bullet," which is unique to Armagh and Co. Cork.

The county capital is **Armagh City** and other main towns are **Craigavon**, **Lurgan** and **Portadown**.

Getting Here & Around

◆ By Air and Sea

The nearest air and seaports are in Belfast. Ulsterbus connects the county's towns and villages. For timetables, Translink, ☎ (028) 9066-6630, 7 am to 8 pm daily.

◆ By Road

For the fastest journey to Armagh City from Belfast take the M1 and then A29; alternatively, head for Portadown on the M1 and then the A3; or take the A1 towards Banbridge and then the A51, passing through Tandragee. Lurgan, Craigavon and Portadown are close to the M1 from Belfast on the A27.

From Derry City, take the A5 through Strabane and Omagh to Aughnacloy, then the A28.

From Dublin take the N1 through Dundalk, the A1 from Newry, and then the A28. From Monaghan Town in the Republic, take the A3.

Tourist Information

Armagh Tourist Information Centre is at 40 English Street, Armagh; ☎ (028) 3752-1800; fax 3752-8329; tic@armagh.gov.uk; www.visitarmagh.com.

South Armagh Tourism Initiative is based in O'Fiaich House, O'Fiaich Square, Crossmaglen. ☎ (028) 3086-8900; fax 3086-0001; or look at its excellent Web site, www.south-armagh.com.

Cascades Leisure Centre, Thomas Street, Portadown. ☎ (028) 3883-2802.

Slieve Gullion Courtyard Centre. ☎ (028) 3084-8084

North West Passage, www.northwestpassage.org

Armagh & Down Tourism, www.armaghanddown.com

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

Armagh Ancestry, 40 English Street, open Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm. Contact the genealogical researcher in advance of your visit; ☎ (028) 3752-1802; fax 3751-0180; www.visitarmagh.com. Family history research service is available at the **Cardinal Tomas O'Fiaich Library**.

Sightseeing

◆ Armagh City

The city of Armagh is one of the most historic on the island. It was the seat of the ancient Kings of Ulster, who were crowned at nearby *Emain Macha* (**Navan Fort**; see next page). There's a graciousness about the city, with its steep streets following the curves of the ditches that surrounded the ringfort, or *rath*, where Saint Patrick built his stone church in 445.

In the **Palace Demesne** are the ruins of a Franciscan friary, founded in 1263. Few medieval buildings have survived, but there are many fine examples of Georgian architecture, especially around the tree-lined Mall.

Visit **St. Patrick's Church of Ireland Cathedral**, built on the site of the saint's church. Brian Boru, who drove the Norsemen out of Ireland in 1014, is said to be buried in its churchyard, and among other interesting monuments is an 11th-century high cross. Tours in summer ☎ (028) 3752-3142; www.stpatricks-cathedral.org.

The grounds of the **Armagh Observatory**, a modern research facility, include the Robinson dome with 10-inch telescope, and other interesting features, with free access always. There's a self-guided **Observatory Grounds Trail**. Call for details. ☎ (028) 3752-2928; fax 3752-7174; www.arm.ac.uk. The **Armagh Planetarium** is nearby, with daily audio-visual presentations. ☎ (028) 3752-4725; www.armaghplanet.com.

St. Patrick's Trian derives its name from the ancient division of Armagh City into three distinct districts, or "Trians." The visitor complex is on English Street. There are three major exhibitions: The Armagh Story, Saint Patrick's Testament and The Land of Lilliput, inspired by *Gulliver's Travels*, whose author, Jonathan Swift, spent a lot of time in Armagh. Open daily year-round. ☎ (028) 3752-1801; info@saintpatrickstrian.com; www.stpatrickstrian.com.

The **Cardinal Tomas O'Fiaich Memorial Library and Archive** is at 15 Moy Road, and admission is free. Material is from the late Cardinal's collection, and includes Irish history and language, Church history, the Irish diaspora and Irish sport. There's also an annual program of events and lectures, and a family history research service. Library and Archive open Monday-Friday, 9:30 am-1 pm and 2-5 pm. ☎ (028) 3752-2981; fax 3751-1944; eolas@ofiaich.ie; www.ofiaich.ie.

Navan Fort

On the A28, 2½ miles (four km) west of Armagh, is Navan Fort, or *Emain Macha*, capital of the Kings of Ulster from 600 BC. Access is free and it's open all the time. The **Navan Interpretative Centre** is open daily, June-August; ☎ (028) 3752-1801; fax 3751-0180; navan@armagh.gov.uk, www.visitarmagh.com.

Tours

The Pilgrim's Trail is a self-guided walking tour you can take around the city. Allow an hour, longer if you want to visit any of the attractions en route. Details on the St. Patrick's Cathedral Web site – see above.

Guided walking tours of city on weekends from June through September; for details, ☎ (028) 3755-1119; info@armaghguidedtours.com, www.armaghguidedtours.com.

Apple Orchards

For 3,000 years, apples have been grown in the county, mostly in the gentle landscape of the northeast around Loughgall, which is surrounded by 5,000 acres (2,000 hectares) of orchards – a lovely sight in May when all the trees are covered in blossoms.

◆ South Armagh

Near Crossmaglen, off the B30 at Mullaghbawn, is the **Tí Chulainn Cultural Centre**, dedicated to the culture of South Armagh. There's a tea room, a shop, and a small hostel; you can ask about courses and performances. ☎ (028) 3088-8828.

Slieve Gullion

Slieve Gullion – "the mountain of the steep slope," on the B113, five miles (eight km) southwest of Newry – is the highest in Armagh. It's an eight-mile (11-km) drive up and around it. There's a mountaintop trail to walk (at 1, 880 feet/573 m), which takes you to megalithic cairns and a lake with fantastic views. There's also a walled garden, and a Visitor Centre with craft shop and a café. Open daily, Easter through the end of summer, 10 am to dusk. ☎ (028) 3755-1277.

On the southern slope of Slieve Gullion is a large stone cairn covering a Neolithic (New Stone Age) passage tomb, known locally as

Caillaigh Berra's House. It's a notable feature in the landscape, as it sticks out from the mountain slope.

Killevy Churches

On the eastern side of the mountain is a site well worth a visit. One of the earliest convents in the whole country, now known as Killevy Churches, was founded here by **Saint Moninna**, who died around 518. Her feast day is July 6, still celebrated with visits to the well above the site of the convent, reached by a path. Water from this holy well, like many others all over the 32 counties, is said to cure a specific ailment – in this case, eye problems. The graveyard is still in use today.

◆ Craigavon

Named after the first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, James Craig, Lord Craigavon, this New Town was established to relieve pressure on Belfast, 30 miles (48 km) away, and to rejuvenate the area. It brought together the existing towns of Lurgan and Portadown with nearby small villages that had one thing in common – the linen industry. Craigavon has officially existed since 1973, and is not particularly attractive, surrounded by industrial buildings, business parks and busy roads, including the M1 from Belfast to Dungannon. However, it's close to **Lough Neagh**, the largest freshwater lake in the UK, and the area attracts visitors interested in watersports, fishing, and bird watching or in walking or cycling around it. There's a map and guide available to the Loughshore Trail, the 128-mile (206-km) route around Lough Neagh and Lough Beg; check out www.loughshoretrail.com.

Great crested grebe on Lough Neagh

◆ Lurgan

The town was granted to the Brownlows after 1607. They came from Nottingham in the English Midlands. But Lurgan didn't prosper until around 1700, when Samuel Waring introduced linen-damask weaving to Ulster. You can see cottages built for the weavers around Bownes Lane. Textiles and clothing are still important industries here. **Brownlow House** is now the HQ of the Imperial Grand Black Chapter of the British Commonwealth, a close relation of the Orange Order, and its grounds are a public park with landscaped gardens, a lake and golf course.

James Logan (1674-1751), a scientist and scholar, who helped found Pennsylvania, is remembered at the **Quaker Meeting House** on High Street (the first in Ireland in 1653) with a plaque on a gate pillar. Another American connection is **Field Marshall Sir John Dill**, buried in Arlington Cemetery, who liaised between the US and British governments in World War II. He was born here.

◆ Portadown

The town has seen sectarian strife even in recent years, due to the **Orange Order** marching down the nationalist Garvaghy Road from nearby Drumcree Church. Even when passing through on the train you can't help noticing the number of Union Jacks, the UK flag, on display.

It has a wide and sloping main street and the center seems full of churches and chapels; there are more than a dozen of them within a small area. In the 1730s, the building of a canal, which passes through the town on its way from Newry to Lough Neagh, brought prosperity. Use of the canal declined after the 1840s, and it was last used in the 1930s.

Six miles (10 km) west of Portadown is **Loughall**, where the Battle of the Diamond in 1795 led to the foundation of the Orange Order, three miles (4.8 km) away in Dan Winter's House. His traditional thatched cottage is now a museum, which can be visited (key at farmhouse). Open Monday-Saturday, 10:30 am-8:30 pm, Sunday from 2:30 pm. Donation voluntary. ☎ (028) 3885-1344; www.orangenet.org/winter.

Adventures

◆ On Foot & On Wheels

The Newry Canal Way

This route is 20 miles (32 km) long and follows the towpath of the disused canal between Bann Bridge, Portadown, and the Town Hall in Newry. Parts of the walk are in neighboring County Down.

Walkers and cyclists share the Way, as it is part of Route 9 of the National Cycle Network. There is much to see, including lots of wildlife and art pieces. You can continue from the towpath on Route 9 from Newry to Camlough and the Slieve Gullion Courtyard Centre, via the National Trust property, Derrymore.

There's an illustrated guide, *The Newry Canal Way*, which is well worth getting, and a map-leaflet, available from tourist offices, or check out www.countrysiderecreation.com.

Brackagh Moss Nature Reserve

Just off the A27, two miles (3.2 km) southeast of Portadown, is the Brackagh Moss Nature Reserve. This was originally a raised bog, but after more than 300 years of turf cutting what's left is a maze of pools, drainage channels and peat ramparts. Because of its different soils, it has an extremely varied flora, from dense woodlands to fens and shallow pools. There are rare butterflies, dragonflies, and other insects; you see flocks of ducks, and even mink or otter. Look for the two pull-offs along the road, which have information panels with details of the path system north of the road. You can't visit the south side without special permission from the warden, as it's dangerous.

Waymarked Way

The waymarked **Ring of Gullion Way** starts in Newry. It follows the natural geological formation known as a ring-dyke through this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), ending at Derrymore House near Bessbrook. It's 33 miles (53 km) long but you can tackle it in stages. The terrain includes forestry tracks, rugged open hillside, grassy tracks, parts that are boggy and in places it is steep. You'll also see plenty of historic monuments and standing stones.

Forest Parks

Other walking areas include **Carnagh Forest**, **Gosford Forest Park**, and **Slieve Gullion Forest Park**, managed by the Forestry Service. It's worth looking at the Web site, www.forestserviceni.gov.uk, for details of these and other forests and their amenities.

Close to Lough Neagh

The Wetlands Way is a series of waymarked trails on quiet roads and paths through the South Lough Neagh wetlands, an area rich in natural and human heritage.

Maghery Country Park, on the shores of Lough Neagh, offers woodland walks. **Portadown People's Park** is also ideal for walking. The **City Park** has a network of walking and cycling paths in 250 acres (100 hectares) of parkland around Craigavon Lakes. **Lurgan Public Park** covers 200 acres (80 hectares) with wooded areas, a lake, and open grassland.

The Lagan Canal Towpath

This walk near Craigavon is a mile and a half long (2.4 km). Half of the walk follows the National Cycling Network Route 9 and the Lough Neagh Cycleway: the Loughshore Trail.

Nearby is the **Montiaghs Moss** area, a peat habitat, where the traditional activities of fishing the Lough and willow basket-making continue.

◆ On Water

Kinnego Marina is the largest on Lough Neagh, and you can get expert instruction in sailing or powerboating here. You can also stay in a converted farmhouse now a hostel, or in the caravan park. Open April 1-October 31, 8 am-9 pm; November-March, 8:30 am-5:30 pm. ☎ (028) 3832 7573; kinnego.marina@craigavon.gov.uk; www.craigavon.gov.uk.

Oxford Island is north of Craigavon; it's a National Nature Reserve offering a huge choice of activities, some on Lough Neagh, others close to the lake.

The ***Master McGra***, a cruiser named after a famous greyhound, runs tours on the Lough. Visit the **Lough Neagh Discovery Centre**, where there are displays and interactive games about the area. There's a craft shop, tourist information, and a café with panoramic views. Outdoor facilities include bird-watching hides, guided walks. Open daily all year from 10am, to 6pm April to September, (7pm on Sundays) and closes at 5pm rest of year. ☎ (028) 3832-2205. It's worth seeing the map on www.oxfordisland.com/loughneagh.

Fishing

There's a guide, *Angling in Armagh and Down*, available from tourist offices. **Angling Fisheries Limited**, which incorporates Armagh District Angling Club, is the body responsible for fishing and angling. You can get advice and daily permits from **GI Stores**, 5 Dobbin Street, Armagh. ☎ (028) 3752-2335; des@gistores.com, www.visitarmagh.com.

South Armagh has some of the best waters for game and coarse angling, and nearby Carlingford Lough offers exciting sea fishing. See www.south-armagh.com for details of two-night and longer fishing breaks.

◆ On Horseback

Armagh's wonderful rural countryside is ideal for riding, and there are a number of facilities to choose from.

The Newtownhamilton Equestrian Cross-Country Course is signposted off the A29 road to Dundalk. Open weekends and evenings; phone for details. ☎ (028) 3087-8126.

The Ring of Gullion Trekking Centre at Mullaghbane has themed trail rides for adults and classes for beginners. It also has a coffee shop, and offers accommodation. ☎ (028) 3088-9311.

The Greenvale Trekking Centre is at Forkhill at the foot of Slieve Gullion. It offers pony trekking, activity weekends and half-day treks, with instruction available. Accommodation is also available. ☎ (028) 3088-8314; greenvale@yahoo.com.

The **Moy Riding School** offers classes and also has showjumping on Friday evenings, which is open to the public. ☎ (028) 8778-4440.

Golf

There are eight 18-hole courses in the county.

- ***The Armagh County Golf Club*** *is on Newry Road, in the Palace Demesne. ☎ (028) 3752-5864; fax 3752-5861.*
- *At the* ***Loughgall Country Park*** *you can rent clubs. It also has facilities for fishing and walks. ☎ (028) 3889-2900; fax 3889-2902; www.visitarmagh.com.*
- *The* ***Craigavon*** *course, two miles (3.2 km) north of Lurgan, is part of the* ***Golf/Ski Centre****, which also has an artificial ski slope, as well as a driving range. ☎ (028) 3832-6606; fax 3834-7272.*
- ***Ashfield Golf Club*** *is four miles (6.4 km) north of Crossmaglen, off the B30. ☎ (028) 3086-8180; fax 3086-8611; ashfield.golfing@virgin.net.*
- ***Cloverhill*** *is 10 miles (16 km) southwest of Newry. ☎ (028) 3088-9374; fax 3088-9199; info@cloverhillgc.com; www.cloverhillgc.com.*
- ***Lurgan's Golf Club*** *is in the town park. ☎ (028) 3832-2087; fax 3831-6166.*
- *The* ***Portadown*** *course is three miles (4.8 km) southeast of the town. ☎ (028) 3835-5356.*
- *Just half a mile south of* ***Tandragee*** *is its* ***Golf Club****. ☎ (028) 3884-1272; fax 3884-0664; office@tandragee.co.uk; www.tandragree.co.uk.*

Leisure Activities

If you want to swim or use a gym, there's a **leisure center** in Craigavon, a facility called **Waves** in Lurgan and another called **Cascades** in Portadown. The **Orchard Leisure Centre** is on Folly Lane, Armagh. ☎ (028) 3751-5920. In City Park, Craigavon, there's a **Watersports Centre**. There are public **tennis courts** in parks in Lurgan, Brownstown and Portadown.

Spectator Sports

The **Armagh Harps Gaelic Football Club** is on Loughall Road, and you can check out the County GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association) team and other Gaelic sports locally or on www.armagh-gaa.com.

The **Armagh Road Bowls Association** is based at 23 Ennislare Road, if you want to find out more about this almost unique sport. The only other place where you'll see it played is Cork, in the Republic. The All-Ireland Road Bowls Finals are held annually in early August. ☎ (028) 3752-2437.

Shopping

The street layout of Armagh City is much as it was in the 19th century, with Scotch Street, English Street, and Thomas Street its principal shopping areas. The old tradition of street trading continues on **Market Street**, with open-air stalls. The **Mall Shopping Centre** is right in the center of town, with lots of different shops under one roof.

Entertainment

There's a four-screen cinema, **Armagh City Film House**, and **The Market Place Theatre and Arts Complex** hosts plays, exhibitions and other events. ☎ (028) 3752-1820; admin@marketplacearmagh.com; www.themarketplacearmagh.com.

PARKING

There are car parks, signposted, all around the central area. Try the one at the Mall Shopping Centre first.

Where to Stay

For accommodations pricing guide, see page 527.

◆ Hotels

☆☆☆☆ **The Armagh City Hotel** is on Friary Road, next to the Palace Stables and overlooking the County Armagh Golf Club. It has 82 spacious bedrooms and guests can enjoy a choice of dining from the contemporary menu at **The Friary Restaurant**. Its leisure center has a pool and fitness suite and other facilities. Rates from $$ with special offers available online. ☎ (028) 3751-8888, fax 3751-2777; info@armaghcityhotel.com, www.armaghcityhotel.co.uk or www.mooneyhotelgroup.com.

☆☆ **The Charlemont Arms Hotel** on English Street, Armagh, has looked after travelers since the early 19th century. It's been run by the Forster family since 1934, and in recent years has been refurbished. There are 30 bedrooms, a restaurant, and a bar. In its basement is a café/winebar called **downstairs@turners**. $$. ☎ (028) 3752-2028; fax 3752-6979; info@charlemontarmshotel.com; www.charlemontarmshotel.com.

◆ Guesthouses/B&B

De Averell Guest House on Upper English Street, Armagh, is named after John Averell, Dean of Emly and Bishop of Limerick, who in the late 18th century built seven houses for his sisters – because, it's said, he didn't want them to own their own! The guesthouse is No 3 Seven Houses, and is a marvelous Georgian retreat, with five bedrooms. $. It also has a restaurant – **The Basement** – which is open to non-residents, serving local and international dishes, using the best of local produce. ☎ (028) 3751-1213; fax 3751-1221; www.visitarmagh.com.

Ballinahinch House is surrounded by green fields and offers guests the pleasure of staying in an historic home with modern facilities. It's between Armagh and Portadown on the B131 to Richhill. $ for two

sharing. ☎/fax (028) 3887-0081; info@ballinahinchhouse.com; www.ballinahinchhouse.com.

◆ Rental Cottages

☆☆☆☆ **TK's Cottage** is in a small development of houses near Crossmaglen and has three bedrooms, sleeping six. It can be rented by the night, weekend or by the week, and is excellent value. ☎ (028) 3086-8780; www.armaghholidayhome.com.

Ballydougan Pottery Courtyard Cottages, on the main B3 road between Lurgan and Gilford, are in the grounds of the historic **Bloomvale House**, home to the award-winning pottery. In this delightful setting you can watch the skilled potters at work, visit the Gift Shop, or relax over a coffee, lunch or afternoon tea at **The Linen Barn Coffee Shop**. There's a choice of accommodations in an enclosed courtyard: the four-star Bramley Apple Cottage, sleeps four; the four-star Wheaten Loft Studio Apartment sleeps two; and the three-star Gaskins Grove sleeps six. Two-night minimum stay. ☎ (028) 3834 2201; fax 3834 2201; ballydouganpottery@btinternet.com, www.ballydouganpottery.co.uk.

◆ Camping & RV Parks

☆☆ **The Kinnego Marina Caravan Park**, Lurgan, is signposted off the M1 at Junction 10 for Oxford Island, and is on the shores of Lough Neagh in the National Nature Reserve. Open April 1-October 31. ☎ (028) 3832-7573; kinnego.marina@craigavon.gov.uk; www.craigavon.co.uk.

☆☆☆ The **Caravan and Camping Park in Gosford Forest Park**, Markethill, is in wonderful surroundings, including a nature trail, walled gardens, and a red deer park. It's off the A28, seven miles (11 km) from Armagh, 12 miles (19 km) from Newry. There's a barbecue site and café, and it's open all year. ☎ (028) 3755-1277.

☆☆☆ **The Clare Glen Caravan Park** is a mile (1.6 km) from Tandragee on the Markethill Road, and is open all year. ☎ (028) 3884-1110.

◆ Hostel

Armagh City Hostel, 39 Abbey Street, belongs to Hostelling International Northern Ireland. Open year-round, but note that, unlike the majority of hostels today, it retains the traditional custom of closing

during the day so you have to be out from 11 am to 5 pm. ☎ (028) 3751-1800; info@hini.org.uk www.hini.org.uk.

Where to Eat

The Yellow Door Deli, Woodhouse Street, Portadown, is a coffee shop using the best of the North's produce, including specialty breads, pastries and a daily choice of dishes. ☎ (028) 3835-3528.

The Planters Tavern, Banbridge Road, Warringstown, is a listed 17th- century coaching inn, which is open every day for breakfast, lunch and bar lunch, with an à la carte menu and snacks. Local beef and poultry are specialties in its medieval-themed dining room, **Cloisters Brasserie**. Main courses from about £5-15. Warringstown is a picturesque village on the A26 south of Lurgan; note that you can also stay at the Planters Tavern. $ sharing. ☎ (028) 3888-1510; fax 3888-2371.

The Four Trees Bar on Main Street, Moira, in an attractive historic building, has a separate dining area called the **Loft Bistro**. Open daily, 11:30 am to 7 pm. ☎ (028) 9261-1437; fax 9261-3939; thefourtrees@wheretonight.com; www.wheretotonight.com.

The Avanti Restaurant and the **Junction Bar** in the Seagoe Hotel on Upper Church Lane, Portadown, belong to A Taste of Ulster – the eating-out initiative supported by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. Its members use fresh local produce in dishes that suit every taste and budget. There's a free brochure available from tourist offices. The Avanti is open every day for lunch and dinner, and there's a snack menu in the Junction Bar. ☎ (028) 3833-3076; fax 3835-0210; www.seagoe.com.

The Coffee Shop in The Navan Centre on Killylea Road, Armagh, is open daily, June through August, Monday to Saturday, 10am to 5pm; Sundays from noon (closed July 12). Its menu includes hot and cold dishes. ☎ (028) 3752-1801; fax 3751-0180; navan@enterprise.net; www.navan.com.

Fermanagh-Lakeland

Fermanagh is dominated by the 50-mile/80 km-long **Lower and Upper Lough Erne** – actually two lakes – joined by the meandering River Erne. The county town, Enniskillen, stands on the bank of the river between the two lakes. There are many little wooded islands in the loughs, with evidence of ancient cultures and ruins from the Early Christian era.

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The landscape is a patchwork of gentle hills and fertile fields dotted with woods and forests. Yet what you're most aware of as you walk, cycle or drive around, are its lakes and rivers. In addition to Lough Erne, on the county's western boundary are **Upper** and **Lower Lough Macnean**, with **Belcoo** between them, and **Lough Melvin** in its northwest corner. More than a third of the county lies under water.

The Erne River and Lake System is joined to the River Shannon by the **Shannon-Erne Waterway**, and is the perfect destination for anglers and those who enjoy cruising, canoeing or windsurfing. On land are historic sites, stately homes, museums and other attractions to visit, plus activities such as cycling, walking and playing golf.

Fermanagh's main towns are **Irvinestown**, **Lisnaskea** and **Rosslea**, and the largest is **Enniskillen**, the county town.

Getting Here

◆ By Road

Enniskillen is served by major roads: A4-M1-A3-M1 from Belfast (86 miles/138 km); A509-N3 from Dublin (109 miles/174 km); A4-N16-N15-N17 from Galway (114 miles/182 km).

◆ By Rail

The nearest train station is in Sligo; www.iarnrodeireann.ie, ☎ +353 1 836-6222 or 1850 366-222.

◆ By Air

Enniskillen Airport (St. Angelo) has been closed in recent years. Check www.enniskillen.com for updated information. Currently, the closest airports are Derry City, Belfast International and Dublin.

Getting Around

Ulsterbus has a terminal in Enniskillen and operates a full range of services throughout the county, Ireland and the UK. Contact Ulsterbus at ☎ (028) 9033-3000; www.ulsterbus.co.uk.

Contact **Bus Éireann** for services to the Republic. ☎ (01) 8366-111.

Tourist Information

The **Tourist Information Centre**, Wellington Road, Enniskillen, is open all year. ☎ (028) 6632-3110; fax 6632-5511; tic@fermanagh.gov.uk; www.eniskillen.com/fermanagh.

There's also a tourist office in **Belleek**, in the Erne Gateway Centre, open daily, July to September, ☎ (028) 6865-8866; fax 6865-8833.

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

The Genealogy Centre for those with ancestors from Co. Fermanagh is shared with the one for the neighboring county: **Irish World Family History Services**, 51 Dungannon Road, Coalisland, Co. Tyrone. ☎ (028) 8774-6065; info@irish-world.com; www.irish-world.com. There's also a genealogical searching service in the **Rosslea Heritage Centre**. ☎ (028) 6775-1750.

Sightseeing

◆ Enniskillen

Enniskillen is in the middle of the county, on an island in the **River Erne**, between Upper and Lower **Lough Erne**. The town developed around the castle, which dates back to the 15th century. This was once the stronghold of the Maguire chieftains.

Enniskillen Castle

Enniskillen became a garrison town when granted to Sir William Cole, who enlarged the castle and built the lovely **Water Gate**. It was the most important of a ring of castles as it was built to control the waterway; the other castles include **Portora** – its ruins are in the grounds of the Portora Royal School, founded by James I in 1608. Famous students include writers Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) and Samuel Beckett (1905-1989).

The town has a long and winding main street that keeps changing its name, and branching off it are fascinating medieval lanes. In the lobby of the town hall there's a brass plate, a memorial to Captain Oates of the 6th Inniskilling Dragoons, an icon of self-sacrifice because, ill and unable to move at the pace of the rest of the party, he walked out into a blizzard and perished during Scott's return from reaching the South Pole in 1912, rather than slow their progress.

The town bustles with life and commerce, and attracts visitors interested in fishing, boating and other activities. There are lots of bait and tackle shops and gift shops selling the distinctive cream-colored ware made nearby at **Belleek Pottery** (on the A46 near Enniskillen).

Dominating the skyline is **Enniskillen Castle**, with its picturesque location on the water. It was a Maguire fort, Plantation castle and, from the late 18th century, artillery barracks. Its 15th-century keep houses the **Fermanagh County Museum** and the museum of two regiments, the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and the Dragoons. Open daily,

Enniskillen
B206
Race Course Lough
River Erne
Cherry Island
Queen Elizabeth Road
A32
The Brook
Ann St
Head St
Hall's Ln
Darling St
Church St
Market St
Wellington Road
Henry Street
Forthill Street
High St
Paget Ln
East Bridge St
Belmore St
Sligo Road
River Erne
Dublin Road
B80
A4
A4
To 16
N
NOT TO SCALE
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1. Enniskillen Castle; Fermanagh County Museum
2. West Bridge; Castle Bridge
3. St. Michael's RC Church; Methodist Church
4. St. Macartin's Church of Ireland Cathedral
5. Library
6. Crown Buildings
7. Boston Quay Craft Shop; Buttermarket
8. Town Hall
9. Footbridge (Inish Walk)
10. Inis Cethlenn Bridge & Park
11. East Bridge
12. Forthill; Coles Monument
13. Fairgreen
14. Brook Park; *Kestrel* Waterbus
15. Lochside Cruises
16. To Ardhowen Theatre; Castle Coole
17. Court House; Presbyterian Church

May to September; weekdays only the rest of the year. ☎ (028) 6632-5000.

Self-guided Tour

The self-guided **Enniskillen History Trail** features over 20 landmarks in the town. Ask about it at the tourist office.

Guided Tours

Heritage Tours are led by qualified guide and broadcaster Breege McCusker; these include a walking tour of Enniskillen, Plantation Castles and Stately Homes, Lough MacNean and Marlbank. ☎ (028) 6862-1430; bmccusker@talk21.com.

Tully Castle

Erne Heritage Tours has general, customized and specialized trips led by qualified guides, on foot, by car and coach. ☎ (028) 6865-8327; adam4eves@aol.com; www.erneheritagetours.com.

It's worth looking at www.ernelakelands.com for the full range of touring options.

◆ Explore the County

The grounds of **Castle Coole**, on the A4 just outside Enniskillen, are a lovely place for a walk at any time of the year, and there's no charge in winter. As you walk up the drive you pass golfers on the Enniskillen Club course (see below).

Castle Coole

It's a National Trust property, and the house is magnificent, standing above its landscaped parkland. James Wyatt designed it in the 18th

century, and it has a beautiful Regency interior. House open mid-March to end September; times vary. ☎ (028) 6632-2690; castlecoole@ntrust.org.uk.

South of Enniskillen

South from Enniskillen on the A4, turn left onto the A509 Cavan Road and after four miles (6.4 km) you're in the village of **Bellanaleck**, where you can stop and enjoy the **Sheelin Irish Lace Museum and Shop**. Exhibits all date from 1850-1900. Open Monday-Saturday, 10 am-6 pm. ☎ (028) 6634-8052; rosemary.cathcart@virgin.net; www.irishlacemuseum.com.

Florence Court

After your visit to Bellanaleck, return to the A4 (signposted Sligo) and turn left. Just over a mile farther on, you reach the A32 junction (marked Swanlibar) and turn left. Look for signs on your right for the road to Marble Arch Caves and **Florence Court**. It's a National Trust property and the grounds are open all year. It's the home of the Irish yew, now found all over the world. The original tree, discovered about 1760, can be seen on the edge of Cottage Wood to the southeast of the house. The magnificent Georgian mansion is open for visits from March to end September. ☎ (028) 6634-8249; florencecourt@ntrust.org.uk.

Follow the signs for the nearby **Marble Arch Caves**, where the fascinating guided tour includes an underground boat journey through stalagmites and stalactites. Open March-September, daily. ☎ (028) 6634-8855; mac@fermanagh.gov.uk, www.marblearchcaves.net.

Irvinestown

Irvinestown is in the north of the county, where the A32 and A35 meet. It was founded in 1618 by Sir Gerald Lowther and named after him, but changed its name when it passed to the Irvines of Dumfries in Scotland.

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It's built around a very wide main street. A market is held year-round and there's a 10-day festival and carnival in summer. It's called **The Lady of the Lake Festival** and it begins on the Friday after July 12.

Lisnaskea

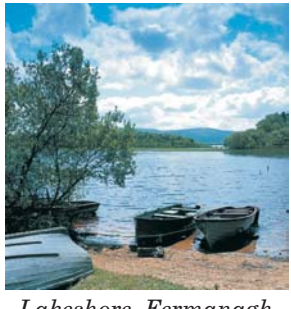
Lisnaskea is south of Enniskillen, at the B514/A34 junction. It's the county's second town, but small, with a population of under 3,000. It's built around a long main street, which bends at almost a right angle at one point. The town's **Cornmarket** (1841) has a High Cross from an historic monastery. Sandstone and limestone were produced in the area, and used in the town's buildings.

Just off Main Street are the ruins of **Balfour Castle**, built about 1618 by Sir James Balfour, a Scottish planter. The castle was occupied until the early 19th century. It's being restored, and can be visited at any time, free. Today Lisnaskea continues to thrive as the market town for the surrounding agricultural area.

Rosslea

Rosslea seems tucked away in the easternmost corner of the county, nine miles (14.4 km) west of Monaghan in the Republic. There's a **Heritage Centre** housed in an old school (1874), which still has its desks, and displayed are old farming implements, crochet pieces and other crafts. It also runs a genealogical service. Open Monday-Friday, 10 am-4 pm, weekends by appointment. ☎ (028) 6775-1750.

Scenic Drives



Lakeshore, Fermanagh

The **Cuilcagh Scenic Drive** takes you around the mountains of that name through counties Fermanagh and Cavan. The 50-mile (80-km) drive starts in the little car park at Cladagh Bridge, on the road between Florence Court and Blacklion, and takes in the underground world of the Marble Arch Caves, and the house and gardens at Florence Court.

Another scenic drive brings you to **Lough Navar**, where there's a point with an unforgettable view across Lough Erne to the mountains of Donegal in the distance.

Adventures

◆ On Foot

Crom Estate, Newtownbutler, is on the shores of Upper Lough Erne, three miles (4.8 km) off the A34, south of Enniskillen. There are lovely woodland and lakeside walks in this 1,900-acre National Trust estate, which includes the largest oak woodland in the North. Guided wildlife walks are held on Sunday afternoons in summer. Open March-September. Visitor Centre, ☎/fax (028) 6773-8118.

Crom Estate

A guide called 25 Walks in Fermanagh *covers everything from Enniskillen Town to mountains. Each walk is described with details of terrain and nearby attractions. It's available from the Tourist Information Office in Enniskillen and other outlets.*

You can climb **Cuilcagh Mountain** (2,188 feet/667 m) from near Florence Court, but you'll need boots and suitable clothing. Details of the climb are included in the free booklet called *Walking*, published by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, which I recommend.

Other forest parks include **Necarne**, **Cuilcagh Mountain Park**, **Lough Navar**, **Castle Archdale**, **Castle Caldwell**, **Florence Court**, **Ely Lodge**, **Claddagh Glen**.

◆ On Wheels

Two of the **National Cycle Network** routes pass through Fermanagh. There are maps available from tourist offices, or check out **www.sustrans.co.uk** (the UK charity dedicated to sustainable transport).

The **Kingfisher Cycle Trail**, the first long-distance route marked out in Ireland, follows minor country roads through the border counties of Fermanagh, Leitrim, Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan. It starts at the Enniskillen Visitor Centre, and is 230 miles (450 km) long, with shorter loops possible.

The **Belfast-to-Ballyshannon Route** passes through Enniskillen and on towards the Atlantic Ocean, along quiet roads.

◆ On Water

Monastery, Devenish Island

Lough Erne is wonderful for both cruising and fishing, and is one of the least congested lakes in Europe. In addition to its 154 islands, there are coves and inlets to explore.

Ferries to **Devenish Island**, one of the islands on Lough Erne, leave from Trory Point, down a lane at the junction of the B52 to Kesh and the A32 to Ballinamallard, a mile and a half (2.4 km) north of Enniskillen. They run from Good Friday to mid-September. Devenish has the ruins of an important monastery, founded in the 6th century by St. Molaise.

Since the re-opening of the historic canal between the Erne and the Shannon, the system is the longest navigable, inland waterway in Europe. There are well-equipped cruisers to hire and lots of public jetties and small marinas, many with shops, in Fermanagh.

Cruising Vacations

Belleek Charter Cruising is based at the Erne Gateway Marina, Belleek, ☎ (028) 6865-8027.

For details of other options, check out the following Web sites:

- **Carrickcraft**, www.cruise-ireland.com
- **Inland Waterways Association of Ireland**, www.iwai.ie

Fishing

The **Erne River & Lake System** is renowned among the angling community. No fishing licence is required on the **Shannon**, but you do need a permit for the Erne, available at tackle outlets and tourist offices.

The shores of **Lough Erne** and of **Upper Lough Macnean** and **Lower Lough Macnean** are particularly noted for their stocks of

pike. **Lough Melvin** has a good run of spring salmon and unusual kinds of trout peculiar to remote lakes.

Wherever you are in Fermanagh, there are clearly marked access points, excellent parking facilities, fishing centers and well-stocked tackle shops.

USEFUL CONTACTS

- **Belleek Angling Centre**, ☎ (028) 6865-8181
- **Cloughbally Mill Angling Centre**, near Enniskillen, ☎ (028) 6632-2008
- **Flatfield Flyfishing**, ☎ (028) 6638-8184
- **Knockbracken Trout Lakes**, ☎ (028) 6638-9990; TSK58@aol.com
- **Melvin Angling Centre** in Garrison on the shores of Lough Melvin, for tackle, bait, advice, and boat hire on both Lough Melvin and Lough Erne, ☎ (028) 6865-8194
- **Mickey McGrath Tackle & Bait**, Belleek, ☎ (028) 6865-8181.
- **Manor House Marine Day Boats**, also offers cruisers for vacations, self-catering cottages and a caravan park; ☎ (028) 6862-8100; info@manormarine.com; www.manormarine.com

◆ On Horseback

The Forest Stables, based in Fivemiletown in neighboring Co. Tyrone, offers treks through the forests and foothills of both counties, and is open all year. ☎ (028) 8952-1991.

Golf

The parkland course of **Enniskillen Golf Club** is inside the Castle Coole estate, half a mile east of the town; ☎ (028) 6632-5250.

The **Castle Hume Golf Club** is 3½ miles (5.6 km) north of Enniskillen; ☎ (028) 6632-7077; fax 6632-7076.

The **Lisnarick Golf Club** has a nine-hole meadowland course; ☎ (028) 6862-8030.

Shopping

The Buttermarket, built in 1835 in the Boston Quarter as a marketplace for the county's dairy produce, had been derelict for years but is now restored and houses the **Enniskillen Craft and Design Centre**. You can watch craftspeople at work or buy original items.

Erneside Shopping, The Point, Derrychara, is a modern center with many outlets and places to eat. Open daily, to 9 pm on Thursdays and Fridays, Sunday afternoons. ☎ (028) 6632-5705.

Entertainment

The Ardhowen Theatre has a 290-seat auditorium and a smaller studio, as well as an exhibition area, and has a varied program. It also has two bars and a restaurant, open for coffee and lunch, Monday-Saturday. ☎ (028) 6632-3233; ardhowen.theatre@fermanagh.gov.uk, www.ardhowen-theatre.com.

The best known of Enniskillen's many pubs is probably **Blake's of the Hollow** at 6 Church Street. It has a distinctive Victorian shopfront and its original bar remains untouched after over a century. Added recently are **Café Merlot**, serving bistro-style food, and **The Atrium**, a bar in the Gothic style which spreads over two floors. ☎ (028) 6632-0918.

There are lots of other pubs with traditional and other styles of music, as well as nightclubs, and many restaurants. Inquire at the Tourist Office, or just walk around.

Where to Stay

◆ Hotels

☆☆☆☆ **The Killyhevlin Hotel** is just outside Enniskillen, on the A4, very close to Castle Coole. It offers a choice of rooms, suites, as well as cottages/lodges on the waterside. Many of the rooms have wonderful views over the lake and surrounding countryside. It has comfortable accommodations with a choice of dining, a bar menu or a more exten-

sive choice in its restaurant; new health centre, with pool and gym, and a spa. Rates from $$ with special deals online. ☎ (028) 6632-3481; fax 6632-4726; info@killyhevlin.com; www.killyhevlin.com.

☆☆ **Hotel Carlton** in Belleek has 35 comfortable bedrooms, and its Saimer Restaurant uses locally sourced ingredients. Carvery lunch and a bistro menu is available in its Potters' Bar, where there's also regular musical entertainment. Rates from $$, with special offers and golf breaks available. ☎ (028) 6865-8282; fax 6865-9005; reception@hotelcarlton.co.uk www.hotelcarlton.co.uk.

☆☆ The **Lough Erne Hotel** is on the banks of the Kesh River in the village of the same name. It's welcoming, with only 16 bedrooms, and across the road are the Mill Court self-catering cottages (sleeping four) and studios, ideal for one or two. The hotel's Bridgewater Restaurant is popular with locals, and food is available in its lounge and bar all day, where there's also regular entertainment. Rates from $$. ☎ (028) 6863-1275; fax 6863-1921; info@loughernehotel.com, www.loughernehotel.com.

◆ Rental Cottages

Corralea Cottages & Activity Centre, Belcoo, are in a secluded woodland setting on the shore of Upper Lough MacNean. Each cottage sleeps four to six. Most activities, which include watersports, caving, archery, climbing, are on-site, with free transport to others. Available for weekends, mid-week breaks and on a weekly basis. ☎ (028) 6638-6123; corralea@activityireland.com www.activityireland.com.

Innish Beg Cottages are on a farm seven miles from Enniskillen, with marvellous views over Lough Erne. There's a choice of four, of varying sizes, and they are available for weekends or on a weekly basis. ☎/fax (028) 6864-1525; info@innishbegcottages.com; www.innishbegcottages.com.

For other rentals, guest houses and hotels, take a look at www.enniskillen.com or www.discovernorthernireland.com.

◆ Hostels

The hostel in **Enniskillen** is part of the William Jefferson Clinton International Peace Centre, named after the US President who was closely involved with the Good Friday Agreement. It's called **The Bridges**, and is on Belmore Street, close to the Bus Station, open all year, except December 23-Jan 2. Note that from April-September it's open all day (unlike

some hostels) but from October-March it closes from 11 am-5 pm. ☎ (028) 6634-0110; fax 6634-6873; enniskillen@hini.org.uk, www.hini.org.uk.

Lough Melvin Holiday Centre, Garrison, where outdoor activity packages are also available, open all year. ☎ (028) 6865-8142; enquiry@loughmelvinholidaycentre.com.

◆ Camping & RV Parks

☆☆☆☆ **Castle Archdale Caravan Park & Camping Site**, Irvinestown; licensed bar and restaurant, caravans for hire. ☎ (028) 6862-1333; info@castlearchdale.com, www.castlearchdale.com.

☆☆☆☆ **Blaney Caravan Park & Camp Site**, Cosbytown on A46 to Belleek, open all year, ☎ (028) 6864-1634; info@blaneycaravanpark.com.

☆☆☆ **Mullynascarthy Caravan Park** on the outskirts of Lisnaskea, open April to end of October, ☎ (028) 6772-1040.

☆☆☆ **Lough Melvin Holiday Centre**, Garrison; café/restaurant and shop, outdoor activities; open year-round, ☎ (028) 6865-8142; fax 6865-8719; info@loughmelvinholidaycentre.com, www.loughmelvinholidaycentre.com.

☆☆☆ **The Share Holiday Village** is at Smith's Strand, three miles (4.8 km) south of Lisnaskea on the B127 Derrylin Road. Camping and caravanning open Easter to September, with arts and outdoor activity program, coffee shop and takeaway open July & August. ☎ (028) 6772-2122; www.sharevillage.org, info@sharevillage.org.

Where to Eat

Crow's Nest Bar & Bistro, High Street, Enniskillen. Two bars, an upmarket night club with food served from 9 am to midnight. Live music and late bars every night, plus traditional Irish music sessions on Saturday afternoons. ☎ (028) 6632-5252.

The **Vintage Bar & Restaurant** on Townhall Street, Enniskillen. Four themed bars, and food available from 11:30 am to 8:30 pm every day. At night it becomes **Merlin's Nite Club**. ☎ (028) 6632-4055.

The **Black Cat Cove** on Main Street, Belleek, is family-run. It's a traditional pub with an open fire and its restaurant is open until 9pm every night. There's music every night in spring and summer, weekends the rest of the year. ☎ (028) 6865-8942.

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